

How Important is Having a Testimony of Salvation

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the significance of testimonies in the Christian faith, exploring the biblical perspective on sharing one's testimony for membership and the importance of humility and glorifying God in testimonies. It emphasizes the need to focus on the present faith and walk with the Lord rather than past experiences, highlighting the power of God's grace, mercy, and transformative work in believers' lives.

Scripture: 1 John 5:9, Mark 5:19, Philippians 3:16, Romans 6:21, Ephesians 5:12, Colossians 2:6

Topics: "The Power of Testimony", "Humility in Sharing Faith"

Description

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Transcript

Okay, I got saved in September of 2013. It was pretty dramatic and radical. I'm so thankful to Jesus Christ for saving me.

My mom was in the Campbellite Church of Christ for her whole life until about three months ago. It was and still can be at times a struggle to get her to see that we are saved by grace apart from works like keeping rules and especially water baptism. I moved closer to her when she was going into hospice and now we're going to a Baptist church in town.

I came from a Calvary chapel where sharing testimonies is a common thing, so I never thought anything about it. I was looking at joining this Baptist church and one of the things to officially join is to give your testimony. I would love to share what Christ did.

No problem. Now my mom is a different story. She gets angry and defensive about her testimony even to the point of claiming she doesn't know what people mean by testimony and gets upset that a church would want to hear it as a condition for membership.

So A, is it biblical to make someone give their testimony for membership? And B, should I be concerned that despite growing up in a cult that denies the deity of Jesus Christ and adds baptism as a condition of salvation, she claims to be saved but has no conversion story? So let's just talk about testimonies. What do you think about testimonies? Giving of testimonies. Good, bad, indifferent? Depends on the content.

Depends on what? The content. The content of? What they're actually sharing, saying. Is it a bragamony? Is it an actual testimony? Is it just a reaction to even being asked? Yeah, it seems I've heard people talk like that before.

I don't even know what a testimony means. I mean, that seems to be a void in the life. It means something's missing.

It's asking a person about a reality in their life that isn't a reality. It's asking a person to describe something that they've never seen, and so they really have no description. I mean, a testimony is not essential to join membership, right? What? A testimony is not essential to join a church or be part of a membership, right? Like sharing your testimony.

I don't like the way she said that. Right? Isn't that something that... Because the question was like, okay, right? The testimony needs to be shared to be joined into a membership. Is that biblical? To require your testimony? Is it biblical for someone to say their testimony? He says, Is it biblical to make someone give their testimony for membership? I can't think of any explicit biblical commands that say you have to give your testimony before joining the church.

Yeah, but is it not... Well, I mean, a testimony is just like a witness to something that you've seen or something that you've experienced. And if you truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, then you automatically have a testimony. And I just kind of see it as something that's a joy to share.

I mean, look, the reality is that God's people all through history, if somebody's walking through their door, there's going to be an inquiry into are you a Christian? What has the Lord done for you? I mean, that's commonplace. If we're going to talk about fellowship in the things of the Lord, what did Jesus tell the demoniac? The demoniac wanted to... I mean, he's no longer a demoniac. He's closed in on his right mind.

Now he wants to stay with the Lord and the Lord tells him, No, I want you to go home. You go to your own people and you tell them the things that the Lord has done for you. The Lord doesn't even bat an eye.

That's normal that that's going to happen when somebody gets radically changed and is a partaker of the grace of God. They're going to talk about it. The Scripture talks about those who deny Christ.

The reality is that God's people are people who are going to proclaim the glories of Christ. In fact, that's one of the things that Peter says is a reality about the people of God. Can you think what he says there? He can't help but talk and proclaim about what we've seen and heard.

He says that to St. Adrian. But I mean Peter in his epistles. What does he say we are? Members have an answer to proclaim His excellencies.

Yeah, right there. We are a people expressly said to be saved to proclaim His excellencies. I mean, it's for somebody not to want to say what Christ has done for them.

I mean, it's the greatest thing in the world. I mean, we all want to talk about the greatest things that have happened to us in our lives, the greatest things that have ever been given to us. This is the most amazing, the most incredible, the most marvelous and glorious thing that can happen in any person's life is that they be born again, they be saved by God, they be wrenched out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

And Jesus just assumes. It's normative. Go to your hometown and what are you going to do? You're going to tell them the great things that the Lord has done for you.

So, it's like, is it required for membership? Well, look, the reality is this. Are you going to find, thou shalt give your testimony? No, you don't find that. But if somebody's going to be added to the people of God, I mean, for one thing, oftentimes in those early churches, like if somebody was moving from one church to another, letters would be sent.

I mean, you hear Paul even writing in some of his epistles, well, when so-and-so comes to you, receive him and this person and that person. And what's that all about? Well, it's not only the person coming in with the testimony, you have to think in days when the church was being heavily persecuted, can you imagine if you were behind the Iron Curtain in Russia? Or even today, you see how they're cracking down in China? It's getting worse and worse all the time in China. But if we were in the underground church and somebody walks through the door, it's probably not even enough to hear their testimony.

You'd probably really like it if the church over in Wenzhou from which they came from, they're coming over to, I don't know, Kunming, and they say, you know, I'm from there, I've transferred for work and found the underground church, I've been recommended to come here. I mean, it'd be nice to get letters from the elders back there saying, hey, this guy's legit. He really has been born again.

To have that testimony even authenticated by others besides himself if you're in an environment like that, which it seems like maybe in the days of Paul 2,000 years ago it was. But for somebody to come in and say, I didn't even know what a testimony is. I mean, aside from whether or not you believe in an official church membership or not, you certainly want to know if people are regenerate.

What in the world has God done for them? The last thing you would think is that it would be a task or that you would be slow to do that if Peter, the other text, is that we ought to have a reason for the hope that's within us. You ought to be able to give that reason to lost and to saved alike. If somebody walks through the door, what's your hope? I mean, Peter expects that you should have an answer to that.

Well, my hope is... I mean, we ask oftentimes, you know, if you were to die tonight and be standing before the Lord, on what basis would you be taken into heaven? We should have an answer for the hope that we have, every one of us. And the very fact that this mother went through the church of Christ, didn't believe in the deity of Christ, believed that water baptism was necessary for salvation, I mean, those things coupled with the fact that she doesn't want to give a testimony that that does not bode well for her spiritual condition. Actually, I didn't know that was a distinction about the church of Christ.

They actually denied the Lord's deity? I didn't either, but he says so. So, I mean, it sounds to me like that's his mother's belief even if that's not the church of Christ belief at large, because I've never heard that either. I was looking for this verse, but it's in 1 John 5.9. It says, If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater.

For this is the testimony of God that He is born concerning His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He doesn't really expand on what the testimony is specifically.

He just says, like, you have it in yourself. So it's like, it's almost like when you give your testimony, you're verbally expressing before everyone, I mean, all the details that led up to you believing in the Son of God. I mean, it has logistics, details.

People share intimate things. I mean, it's encouraging for the whole church really. They're just expressing everything that happened up until that point.

That seems like what a testimony is. Like it's in you, and you're giving it to everybody else. Yeah, it's a witness.

We witness to what we have been witnesses to. I thought of, there was a guy who I'd met in college one year. He'd ask, like, why do Christians have to share what they believe so much? And I thought of what Jesus says, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And it's like if your heart is full like what you were saying, it's like if the testimony is in you, if your heart, if you have a love for Jesus, I think you're going to want to speak about what your heart is full of. Just on the reverse, I don't get the sense whatsoever that Martin Lloyd-Jones was opposed to people being able to express what the Lord had done for them. But he was opposed to having those testimonies stated publicly.

And he himself sought to talk very little about himself from the pulpit and his own experiences and his own testimony to things because his fear was that other people would measure themselves. He was afraid of the guy that stands up, whether it's himself or somebody else, and gives this glowing testimony. Then you have people sitting out there in the audience and their own testimony is different, perhaps 100% valid, but different.

And it seems like very often it's kind of like I talked about before Lloyd-Jones' wife actually wishing that she had been like this hardened sinner when she got saved so that it would have been more drastic and more reassuring to her. And sometimes you get these testimonies of people who were so debauched and so wicked and very supernatural testimony of this transformation of life. And what it can actually do is it can leave people thinking, maybe I'm not genuinely saved.

It can actually shatter some people's confidence and assurance. And I know that Brother Charles was telling me about pastors that some of us in this room know and that there being a circle of churches where, and I think James dealt with this last week, but there being a circle of churches where you have to have such a radical testimony and you have to know the day you got saved. And if you don't have this radical I know exactly when I got saved kind of experience, then basically they don't believe that you've legitimately been saved.

And so, you get in circles like that and it seems like lots of these people who come into those circles may have legitimately been saved, but then they're made to think that they haven't been and they need to have one of these experiences. And I think in the very same circles, if I remember correctly, it takes the same kind of call to the ministry to ever believe that you're actually called to pastor. You have to have these radical experiences.

And like I say, they're men who we know. Circles that come pretty close to us. I was thinking, like, is it possible maybe his mom is kind of like Timothy to where he was acquainted with the Scriptures and I don't think Timothy probably had a vain flash of light testimony.

His grandmother and his mother were saved. But I guess the concern with his mom, the guy asking the question, is her getting defensive. Timothy says, I think the defensive thing is probably concerning.

Because I think for somebody to say, you know, I wasn't saved seeing fire fall from heaven like somebody we've heard. I didn't see any visible flash of light and I didn't come out of some really wicked and debauched background. I grew up in a Christian family.

I was taught Scriptures from a child. I don't know when it happened, but I can tell you this, right now, my only hope is Christ. He's my hope now.

And that's really what matters. Because I'll tell you this, over the 30 years or so that I've been saved, you can find people that can tell you the exact date, but then I can tell you the exact date when they weren't in the church anymore and when they had fallen away. I can see how Marlo Jones was careful on that because to be honest, I've had temptations or thoughts about that specific aspect of hearing a super radical testimony and looking at mine.

But I once heard John Piper, I think he was saved at a very young age. I don't know how the question went, but it was more like, you didn't get to do all these bad things and you were spared from them. And I think what was encouraging was that he said that I was still dead in my trespasses and sins at five years old, but God saved me.

So it doesn't matter what type of testimony you have, you were all dead, but God. So that was encouraging to me. And the blind man, I know I was blind, but now I see.

So that's also a Scripture I go to when temptation comes because there's no other explanation. And I will just say this about testimonies. Testimonies can often be an occasion for great displays of pride and exalting one's lost life and almost boasting in the sins of one's lost days.

Remember, when Jesus said something to the demoniac, oh, he could have told all manner of stories about the sins he was involved with when he was lost. But you notice the thing that he wanted that man to focus on. You go to tell those people the great things the Lord has done for you.

And if you're going to talk about yourself in your testimony, let it truly be humbling and debasing. And let the Lord shine through it all. Because... How would you consider the Scripture where the woman at the table says, He has told me all the things that I've done? I don't know.

You said about that as far as sin being put out there. Isn't that like the same style of testimony? Well, to say what He saved you out of I think can be done in a way that is set forth in a way that humbles you and exalts Him. And there are ways that it can be set forth where it just sounds like you're wanting everybody to know what kind of sinner you were.

I've heard some of the most inappropriate things come forth in people's testimonies. And it's just inappropriate. It's not necessary.

They're exalting themselves. It doesn't feel like they're exalting the Lord. It just feels wrong.

It feels bad. I know some refer to Ephesians 5 not to speak of the things done in gardens. I don't know if that's a good application of that text or not.

I was thinking of Romans 6. Maybe Romans 5 and 6 where Paul is kind of talking about you've died to sin. If you think of something that you're dead to, it's not a pretty picture. It's not something you boast about.

And then he also says, what fruit did you gain from the things of which you are now ashamed? Our sin should bring shame, not something that we boast about. It's something that we're dead to. It's something gross, not beautiful.

I think if you tell your testimony in a way that if a lost guy was sitting on the front row and he was dead in his trespasses in all the sins that you used to run in, and you tell your testimony in a way that it feels like you're making yourself out to be superior to him in the life that he's now living, like you would have talked when you were lost and he was lost and you're basically saying, you know, I'm a better drinker, I'm a better this, I'm a better that than you are. I mean, if it sounds like you're basically trying to compete with the lost guy in the front row, that can't be good. You know what? There's ways to talk about our sin that are really humbling to self.

I mean, here's the thing. There can be aspects of your lost life that you boast in. You're kind of proud about it.

And it comes out in the testimony. There are things you did when you were lost that you are deeply ashamed of and it's amazing how they can kind of be glossed over in the telling of a testimony, but if you really bring out the things that you're deeply ashamed about so that when you say it, and then you turn everything to the glory of the Lord and having mercy on your soul, you know it. I mean, you know that there are certain things that you can talk about when you're lost that actually the lost world admires.

But there are things lost or saved that you could say about yourself that it makes you ashamed. I mean, there's real shame about some of the things that we did. I think it's good when you tell your testimony to speak of the things that you're ashamed of when it comes to you, and then just speak of the glorious things that the Lord has done for you.

I think at any point where you're trying to get glory in your testimony, that's a problem. The Lord should be getting all the glory. It's not about you.

You shouldn't even come into the equation. It's all about what He has done. Yeah, one guy can say, well, I did this when I was lost.

And the next guy's like, yeah, well, I did this when I was lost. And the third guy's like, yeah, no, I did this when I was lost. And it's like, guys, you know what I did behind a closed door when I was lost? And everybody recognized right away you're not trying to compete with the others.

You're seeing it as a shameful thing, not a thing to boast in. And if we could see all of it for what it is, we would be horribly ashamed. Further on in Mark 5, notice that woman with the issue of blood.

It's always stuck out to me. Christ looked around to see who had touched Him. The woman, knowing what happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

And He said there, your faith has made you well. I don't know what was contained in the whole truth she was sharing that she touched Christ, but in some way, He kind of made her give a testimony right after being healed. He didn't let her just sneak away in the crowd.

And she was terrified to be publicly speaking about her illness. I don't know how shameful it was to have that issue of blood back then, but here everyone knew about it. But then they knew about Christ.

Well, it was probably a womanly issue of blood. She'd spent all of her money on doctors. Nobody had been able to cure her.

I'm sure she would have gladly gotten away in the crowd and not have to openly speak about it. Pastor Tim, do you think that when there's a pride issue about when people share their testimony and being prideful about their sin, do you think it's not the right view of sin? Like we lose that view of sin when we hear people boasting about it? Does that make sense? Well, we definitely can. You should read, I think James has quoted it recently, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices.

Did you quote that or did somebody else? You should read that. He talks about how Satan seeks to paint sin in nice colors and make it very presentable. Oh, it's tremendous.

I mean, among the Puritan writings, it's some of the best stuff you can read. Precious Remedies. And there's a little Puritan paperback.

I'm sure it wouldn't cost you all that much to buy that. But he just says, you know, you need to think about these sins. These sins killed Christ.

And he describes Christ hanging on that cross. And he describes the sufferings. You just remember these sins that you tend to prize.

It's like lost guys, their idolatry. Well, sports was my idolatry. I chased women and I had a more beautiful one than you did.

And yeah, the things that when we were lost, we prided ourselves in. When we were lost, all of us had certain reputations. All of us had a certain image that we wanted to portray.

We were this or we were that. We could do this better than other people. We could do that.

We were more skilled. We were more adept at it. We were known for... There's no question that there's some sins that we tend to more glamorize.

We tend to find more acceptable. Even among Christians, there are some sins that they're more allowed and smiled upon, that they're just as ugly. And I highly recommend that book.

I think you'd all very much profit from it. Tim, you may have touched on this, but I think before I moved to Austin, the church had a practice of what people would publicly give the testimony. And I think when someone came back, it was all towards email.

So I was wondering as elders... Yes, basically the reason for it, I'm not specifically remembering that some of my own priorities in doing that had to do with Lloyd-Jones reasons for people measuring themselves. I'm not saying that was the primary issue. For us, I believe that the primary issue was just the fact that it felt like we just had too much inappropriateness in those testimonies.

And sometimes, quite honestly, what the people said to us in private seemed considerably different from what sometimes would be said when the person was up there publicly speaking. And I guess we had enough situations occur where at least I, I'll let James speak for himself, but we had enough situations occur where people were giving testimonies where I sat out there extremely uncomfortable that eventually I felt that... I may too. Yeah.

Okay, I'll let James speak for himself. I guess on a smaller scale, it was just we wanted to have a prayer meeting and they would go too long sometimes and we wouldn't have enough time to pray. That was one of the things we discussed.

Okay. I mean, it can be really, it can be a real blessing to have people give testimonies. I mean, I have found at times it's a remarkable blessing.

But then again, I'm not aware to what degree like Nellie and others might experience just what Lloyd-Jones was afraid of, somebody giving their testimony and other people seeking to measure themselves by it and feeling maybe that they don't measure up. So perhaps it's good to give an array of testimonies almost in a kind of selective fashion just to show that there is a broad range. You do have your Timothys who probably didn't know when they were converted.

You have the disciples who I would imagine it's probably hard to pin down exactly through the Gospels when they were saved. The truth is, there are people that have very, very distinct experiences at a very distinct point in time. But other people have very distinct experiences several times.

And some people, they just know that the sun came out kind of during these hours. They don't know exactly when it broke over the horizon, but it did. And we recognize that really, the experience we had when we first got saved, that's not the most important aspect.

What's really critical is always the now. Are we believing now? Are we pressing on now? Are we holding tight now? Today, while it's yet day, are we believing? Are we trusting the promises? This is what Scripture is exhorting us to do. It's to keep embracing now.

It's to be living in faith and running the race with our eyes set upon the Lord now. That's the real issue. The last thing God would have us to do is trust in an event in the past.

I was going to say, do you think you need to be careful? Oh, this is the exact time and place, because you don't want to put confidence in that. I know you said in a previous Bible study, you said, I'm not looking back to an event 28 years ago to determine my current standing with the Lord. You want to be careful not to say, oh, I had this experience so-and-so years ago, so I'm good now.

Jesus says, I'm here, the wind, but you don't know where it's going. So you don't want to look to a particular experience. Well, I don't want to forget the past.

I don't want to ignore the past. I don't want to ignore God's blessings of the past. I think about those things.

I don't think that that would be wrong at all to remember the Lord's dealings with me in the past. The past is often a good motivator for how we pray and how we deal with the Lord now. I mean, there is something to, Lord, have You brought me this far to abandon me here? I mean, have You done all these things up till now to not to leave me here, to leave me alone, to depart from me, to abandon me? I mean, certainly You haven't.

You also quoted Scripture. I think it's in Colossians where it says the things you used to do. It's like a famous Scripture of yours that you like to use.

Do you know? Do the things you did at first. Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ so walk in Him? It could be Philippians 3.16. Oh, what fruit did you now receive? That's Romans 6. It was something that kind of has to do with the things we did in the past. Right.

Yeah, it's the Philippians text. Philippians 3.16, the way it reads, I don't think the ESV necessarily brings it out the best. Let me find it here.

Philippians 3. It's basically, in the ESV it reads this way, only let us hold true to what we have attained. The New King James Version says this, to the degree that we have already obtained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mine the same thing. To the degree that we have already obtained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mine the same thing.

I like that. The Old King James has it as well. But that New King James rendering, to the degree you have obtained, to the degree that you have risen to where you are, to the degree that you have gotten to the place ever since you were saved up until now, mine the same thing.

The way that you've grown, the way that you've made progress, give yourself to the same thing. Mine the same things. I like that.

And the reason I've referred to it is because looking in the past at my life, typically there have been certain things that have been true in the times that... There have been certain things that I really feel like have fed my Christian life as much as anything. And I think I've said before, in my own life, I find that a real consistent prayer life, a real consistent, rich time in the Word, and also immersing myself in the life of others who have run well, especially missionaries, and then at the same time, always trying to keep some amount of evangelism active in my life. I've found that those four things in my own life have been extremely important.

Well, it's late. Father, I pray that... Lord, what I pray is that those that are here, those that are listening, Lord, we want a testimony. And we want to get to the end of our lives.

And when all the people of God are gathered together, we want to be able to tell a story that resounds with Your grace and goodness in our life, Your power. Lord, we want us a testimony. We want a good testimony of Your saving grace and that goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life.

We want a testimony of the power, resurrection power at work in our lives. Lord, empower us. We want a testimony of lives filled with the Spirit.

We want a testimony of our God, powerful in our lives, reality in our lives. Lord, we want You to make a difference. You do make a difference between Your people and the rest, we pray.

Make a profound difference. Just like there was light in Goshen and it was dark among the Egyptians, so make it be light among us, though it be dark everywhere else. And we pray that this light would be profound and visible and that it would give us all a story to tell all through eternity of Your grace and goodness to us.

How You saved us. How You brought us through. How through all the temptations of the devil and the drawings of the world, the difficulties and the confoundings of the flesh that You brought us through victorious.

You talk about not letting anybody steal our crowns. Through all the crown stealers, You prevented ours from being stolen. You allowed them to stay upon our heads.

You allowed us to reach the end, having fought the good fight of faith. Lord, help us fight, in doing all to stand in the evil day when all hell comes against us.

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