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Chapter XVII

SPEAKING FOR CHRIST II

Comrades and Friends, — I spoke to you last week about the duty of testifying to both friends and strangers as to the value of Salvation, and the importance of engaging in the service of God.

Before I go further I want to remark that although many of our people experience difficulty and reluctance in testifying for Christ, we are no whit behind any other section of Christ's people. On the contrary, as is well known, no section of the community makes a bolder or more public confession of faith than does The Salvation Army. Ours is peculiarly a 'house top religion.'

Still, there is room for an immense advance even with Salvationists in the discharge of this duty. Let us therefore enlist a body of Soldiers who will accept it as a special obligation before God.

I. — But now I want to ask, Why this unwillingness to speak upon a subject of such thrilling and infinite importance, after the fashion I have described?

1. Well, the first reason may be traced to custom.

Religious people do not generally discuss their religion in public; anyway, they do not very often describe their own experience. God and His services are, they consider, only to be referred to on particular occasions, and in what are called sacred places. To speak of the love of Christ, the value of the soul, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of Heaven, in a railway carriage, or a goods store, or by the roadside, or at the tea-table, would be regarded by many professing Christian people as being bad form, if not next door to profanity.

Now, many Salvationists have, no doubt, been influenced by the professing Christians around them, and have fallen into some of their customs. But when customs are bad we must break away from them.



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We, at any rate, cannot allow the crowds at our doors to transgress the laws of God, to trample under foot His mercy, and to perish without a word of warning. To speak to them as I have advocated is one method of warning them; and, however others may regard it, this duty must be discharged.

2. Another reason for this neglect can be traced to ignorance.

Many Soldiers do not see it to be their duty to personally warn their friends and neighbors, or to invite them to the Cross.

Many Soldiers, I am sorry to say, do not see it to be their duty to save sinners at all! They think this is the work of their Officers; that is, of those who are set apart and paid for the performance of the task. They do not feel any responsibility for the souls of their workmates or the strangers about them, but seem willing to let them go, quietly and comfortably, down to Hell, so far as they are concerned. Much less would they run the risk of sacrificing their good opinion, or incurring their displeasure, by speaking to them in an omnibus, on the deck of a steamer, or in the roadway.

What an awful blindness this is! May God open the eyes of all such ignorant, shrinking souls who may be here today.

3. Thoughtlessness is another reason why Soldiers fail to discharge this duty.

The obligation to take advantage of the opportunity does not strike them at the moment. Oh, how I have mourned on my own account over chances of this description lost for want of thought! 'Why', I have said to myself, 'did it not occur to me to speak? That chance I can never have again, and I may never have another.'

4. Sometimes the reason may be traced to a spurious kindness.

There is a fear of hurting people's feelings. I am afraid that this fear often shuts the mouths of those who ought to utter words of solemn warning, and for this reason many a poor sinner is left to die in the dark.



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And yet it is often a great mistake to suppose that testimony on the subject of religion is disagreeable; in many instances it would be most welcome, especially from the lips of a Salvationist.

5. Alas! There is occasionally another reason, which is a very unhappy one. The Salvationist is troubled with doubts and fears about his own safety; and, not being certain about his own Salvation, is, consequently, unwilling to speak to others on the subject.

Only too often his voice is silent because he is not sure about his own standing with God, and the rightness of his own life. It is true that the stranger by his side may know nothing of his inconsistency; but that friend, whose name is Conscience, who resides within him, knows how matters stand between him and God. And while he is saying to himself, 'Shall I speak to this man about his soul, or invite him to our Meeting?' Conscience may be saying, 'Would it not be best to get your own heart put right, before you begin to doctor other people?' 'Physician, heal thyself.'

6. But, more commonly, this reluctance may be traced to a stranger feeling of shame which arises when the duty of speaking to people about their souls presents itself.

II. – Here let me offer two or three suggestions which may help you to master those feelings.

1. When you see your chance, take up your cross boldly, and go straight for the discharge of your duty.

2. Listen to no arguments in favour of silence from your own heart.

Do not be hindered by what people may think or say of you. If you see the opportunity of warning a soul from the way of death, seize it there and then.

Beware of the dangerous notion that we are not to speak for Christ unless moved thereto by a Divine impulse.

John Wesley tells us that he was at one time so far influenced by this doctrine, that he resolved to give it a fair trial. Accordingly, he says he rode from York to Barnet without being moved to



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speak to a single soul. Then he threw this notion overboard, and began again to speak to all with whom he came in contact, whether he felt led to do so or not.

The opportunity for this or any other kind of usefulness is the Divine call.

3. At the onset, always throw yourselves on God for His guidance and blessing on what you say and do.

I have already said this, but I say it again.

4. Reckon on the conscience of every individual to whom you speak being on your side.

For, however worldly they may appear, or with whatever scorn or indifference they may at first receive your words, every one has a conscience, although perhaps dormant, but which may be quickened by the Holy Spirit using some word you may say.

5. Study how you can perform your task in the most effective manner.

Treat all to whom you speak with kindness and reasonable manner.

6. With a heart full of love, practice will bring the chief qualification for this kind of work; and that is courage.

Practice, plenty of practice, still more practice, will ultimately make you perfect.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.