

Secret Believers or Public Witnesses?

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 says that “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”
Verses 6 states: “a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

The world is full of diverse people and cultures. Some are pro Christ and pro Christian. Others are anti-Christ and anti-Christian. There are also those who are indifferent to Christ and Christians. Then there are those who do not oppose Christ or Christians but are not tolerant towards their own people turning to Christ and becoming a Christian.

In some of these situations a person can become a Christian very easily without any repercussions from their family or community whilst in others people have been killed, ostracised or excommunicated from their families and communities for turning to Christ.

Is it OK to be a secret believer under certain circumstances or is the only true Christian one that is a public witness to Christ?

John 7: 1 – 24

1) Being a secret believer for a time

- Jesus went around Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life.
 - Jesus’ brothers mocked him by saying that anyone who wants to be a public figure doesn’t act in secret.
 - Jesus went to the Feast of Tabernacles after His brothers had left. He went in secret. (v. 11)
- There were many other times where Jesus acted in secret and tried to stay out of the public eye.
 - After Jesus was transfigured on the mountain where Moses and Elijah appeared to him He told Peter, James and John who were with him not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the resurrection. (Matthew 17: 9)
- Peter tried to be inconspicuous when Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest but ended up denying Jesus.
 - Being a secret believer is fine except if you deny Him when directly confronted with the question whether you’re His disciple or not.
- Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus.
 - John 19: 38 “Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews”
 - Here we see that Joseph, being a secret believer, eventually came out in the open to demonstrate His faith in Jesus
- Jesus had answered His brothers with the statement, “The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right.”
 - In many circumstances there is a time to be a secret believer in which case it may be foolish to publicly declare your faith.
 - Many Muslims believe in Jesus in secret but won’t declare their faith publicly for fear of the reprisals.
 - We who have had no reprisals when believing in Jesus should be slow to judge such before we have been put in the same situation and gone through the hardships that they have to endure when coming to Jesus.
 - In China one church leader rebuked Christians who denied Christ under persecution, but he had endured much persecution for the sake of Christ.
 - The time will come when secret believers, as Joseph, will openly confess Jesus as their Lord.
- At the Feast many people whispered about Jesus
 - They feared the Jews.
 - Many were probably secret believers
 - It is very possible that many of those whispering about Jesus at this Feast of Tabernacles were amongst the 3000 who believed and were baptised after Peter’s message at Pentecost.
 - True faith will eventually be publicly declared.

2) Being hated for the sake of Christ

- The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.
 - Jesus was referring to his brothers who didn't believe in him.
 - People of the world merely go with the flow of the world and so don't make people feel uncomfortable
 - When we are doing something wrong and someone who we know is a very righteous person walks into the room we feel uncomfortable because the very presence of that person makes us realise that what we are doing is wrong.
 - MT 10:21 - 23 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.
- What is our response to those who hate us for the sake of Christ?
 - LK 6:22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.
 - LK 6:27 - 28 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

3) Becoming a public witness

- About halfway through the Feast Jesus began to teach publicly
 - He was questioned about His learning
 - When we publicly declare our faith people will question our beliefs.
 - We need to be ready to give an answer
- Becoming a public witness will be confrontational
 - In some circumstances the mere fact of you believing in Jesus is confrontation because it confronts the status quo of your family and community
 - In other circumstances it is what you declare that will be confrontational.
 - Jesus challenged the Jews on the fact that they weren't actually doing the will of God and therefore didn't know that His teaching was from God.
 - This was a direct challenge especially to the religious leaders who took pride in following the law.
 - When we confront people on their wrong beliefs and sin there is bound to be a reaction.
- MK 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."