Sharing my faith at work — Biblical approach/legal guidelines

Common Perceptions

Often people ask, "Can I talk to my co-workers about religion? Will I get in trouble? Maybe even lose my job?" Some might ask, "If I do, am I really doing the job that I am paid to do?" These and many other questions may come to mind as we look at the opportunity to witness in the workplace.

The Law of the Land

First, let us understand the legal bounds of our government's laws. Religious speech is protected under the First Amendment; religious speech is fully protected according to the U.S. Supreme court. Capitol Sq. Review & Advisory Bd. v. Pinette, 515 U.S. 753, 760 (1995). This includes religious speech, prayers, or other forms of religious expression. Religious expression may include things like wearing a cross or putting a Bible passage up in the office. As long as any item does not interfere with the work setting, it is protected.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) also goes further in protecting religious freedoms. It applies to any company employing 15 or more people, as well as any government agencies. It makes it illegal for an employer:

- (1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or
- (2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin. We are not there to challenge employer or law

To be protected under this provision, an employee must show that: Approach is key (actions)

- 1. He or she holds a sincere religious belief that conflicts with an employment requirement; Christian requirement?
- 2. He or she has informed the employer about the conflict; and
- 3. He or she was discharged, disciplined or subjected to discriminatory treatment for failing to comply with the conflicting employment requirement.

Note that the burden of proof is always on the employee to show why he or she was

treated wrongly. With that in mind, employers are required to make reasonable accommodations for an employee's religious beliefs unless such accommodation would result in undue hardship to the employer. In the end, the laws of our land give us the freedom to speak about our faith in the workplace.

The Truth According to Scripture

"We should at all times and in all ways be ready to give an account of the hope that is in us." (1Pe 3:15) All times and in all places is just as it says, all. In Christian love, we should always be looking to give the same hope we have in Christ Jesus to others. In our daily witness, wherever it may be, we need to keep a few things in mind:

- 1. It is a requirement from our Lord through the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to go into all the world and spread the gospel; not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ at any time. (Ro 1:16) This is not an optional directive.
- 2. It is our responsibility to give as we were freely given, (Mt 10:8) as those entrusted with the gospel (1Th 2:4)—not to please men, but to fulfill the will of our heavenly Father.
- 3. It is our opportunity to show our thankfulness to our Lord who redeemed us. It is giving Him the glory for our own salvation, and everything we have in this life.

Yet what approach should we take? As with all things, it is important to first examine our own conduct to see if we are in line with the will of the Lord. It's through our daily time with the Lord in word and prayer that the Holy Spirit sustains a heart of contrition and repentance. As the Spirit leads us to walk with humble hearts of faith, trusting in His saving mercy, we will strive to please our heavenly Father by being faithful and committed employees; by staying away from filthy talk or gossip; by practicing the fruits of the Spirit, and by handling the stressful situations around us while continuing to treat others with kindness and patience. This will set a good example and build a credible foundation to have a conversation about our faith. Think about the words from Colossians 3:23, where slaves were told how to approach their master's work: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." Our silent conduct will also bear witness of our faith that we may win over

As we are guided to walk the walk, we should be ready to talk the talk. As we walk in the good works our heavenly Father prepared for us, we will have the opportunity to spread the good news which the Spirit uses to work in the hearts of the hearers. May we always be ready to give our testimony and prayerfully look for times to do so. No word will return void. We need not be afraid of the outcome, for as David writes:

those in the world (1Pe 3:1). While our conduct does not convert, it may give the

opportunity to share the hope that is within us when others ask why we live differently.

"What can any man do to me" (Ps 56:4)?

There may be challenges that arise as we do speak. Even though our "rights" may be protected, we know we will still face ridicule, hardships, and potential persecution. May we count all things in this world loss for the sake of the gospel. (Php 3:8) "The harvest is truly white, but the laborers are few. Who will go and work today?"

As we prayerfully approach these conversations let us keep in mind that it is not we who produce the increase, nor is it through some process or approach that others will be saved. How often it is the Lord who brings those who seek Him to us to give us an opportunity to point the way. May we be comforted in knowing that just as "we are saved through faith, and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast," (Eph 2:8-9) so are those to whom we witness. We are not called to convert, but called to give an account. Let us praise the Lord as He graciously uses us to perform His work and thank Him for our salvation and for those to whom we are privileged to speak the Gospel and share the hope of salvation.

References:

- 1. http://www.gotquestions.org/workplace-faith.html
- 2. https://www.rutherford.org/legal_assistance/frequently_asked_questions/
- 3. http://aclj.org/workplace-rights/religious-expression-workplace 4. http://www.cbn.com/finance/rbrwitnesswork.aspx