

Principled Living (Part 5): Witnessing Of God

'You Are My Witnesses'

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This is the age of blockbuster court trials, many of which are televised not only coast to coast but all over the world. We even have a cable TV channel called Court TV. All they do, 24 hours a day, is talk about trials, televise trials, and analyze trials—trials all the time. Usually the more sensational trials involve celebrities of one fashion or another, like the one now going on in California regarding Michael Jackson. Just a short while ago, there was the acquittal of Robert Blake. There was recently the conviction of Martha Stewart. There was the recent out-of-court settlement of Kobe Bryant. There have also been cases regarding Scott Peterson, O.J. Simpson, the Menendez Brothers, Jeffrey Dahmer, and on and on with court trials over the years which made big news not only here but around the world. Perhaps the greatest trials of the twentieth century were the Nuremburg Trials in which Nazi war criminals were tried and prosecuted for their war crimes.

There are several elements that are common to all trials. There are a courtroom and a judge. There are attorneys for each side, the plaintiff(s), and defendant(s). There are court reporters and bailiffs. There are pieces of evidence. Often there is a jury, but not always; sometimes there are spectators; and, of course, there are witnesses.

Sometimes there are only a few witnesses, but sometimes there is a long line of witnesses taking weeks to go through. However, they all have some piece of testimony to express to the court. Witnesses come in all shapes and sizes, from all ranks of society, from all types of intellect, from all different powers of observation, from all different abilities of insight that they might have. Additionally, of course, everyone comes with a different believability quotient. Some people are just naturally believable, while others are not at all.

Some witnesses are called to relate what they saw or heard at a certain place or time. Others are asked to give their expert opinions on a matter, maybe forensics or psychology or some other complex matter that maybe only they or a few others have any real or deep knowledge about. Still others are questioned about a person's normal behavior and character because they know them well. They might have known him for a long time. Others appear in court to corroborate or vouch for the testimony of other witness, not just for the person who may be on trial.

Whatever the reason, witnesses provide information, eyewitness knowledge, personal experience, or validation of some fact. They make known something that is generally unknown to others. They might provide proof that a certain thing is true. Without witnesses, a person's case is doomed to fail. He might as well just throw himself on the mercy of the court or judge; because if the other side has witnesses, they will get their way.

Witnesses are just as vital and necessary in true Christianity. In essence, God has called each one of us to be a witness of Him and for Him before the world. Not all of us witness in the same way or to the same degree, but we are nevertheless all witnesses of and for God. It is a principle of Christian living of which we must always be aware so that we can do it properly and consciously and thus glorify God in the process.

Before we go any further into the sermon, I want to say a word or two on the biblical words translated *witness* or *testimony*. In the Old Testament, the noun that comes up is '*ed*', pronounced "ed" or "aid," and it is used 69 times in the Old Testament. It is primarily a legal or judicial term, which you would expect—in fact, our word *witness* is similarly a legal or judicial term—and it means "one who sees a matter transacted and can attest to that fact." It means the same thing in English: "one who sees a matter transacted and can attest to that fact."

The verb form is '*ud*', used 42 times in the Old Testament. It means, as you would expect, "to bear witness"; but it can also mean "to repeat." As a matter of fact, the root of this word has the connotation of repetition, meaning that you can repeat what you saw—continuously, if need be—to those who need to know, because you were there and saw it happen. Some other meanings (and these will come up as we go through the rest of the sermon) are very interesting, I think, in terms of witnessing; and those are that it can mean "to admonish," "to warn." On the other side, it could mean "to assure" and also "to relieve."

You can see how each one of these came about. If a witness gives something that is considered good testimony, then it will assure and relieve the person that it affects. On the other hand, if the person gives testimony that is more negative, that person receiving it is warned that something bad is coming and he is admonished as to his transgression. You can see how these other definitions that come through extensions of the words have evolved. They are used this way in the Bible on occasion; most often, though, it is used in its legal or judicial sense, meaning "to bear witness" or "to repeat." These definitions of the verb flesh out the meaning of this word considerably and give it a bit more depth.

In the New Testament, the equivalent word from the Greek—and I mean equivalent, which is almost exactly the same—is the various forms of the word *martus* or *martys*, the spelling differing according to who transliterates the phonetics from Greek to English. It carries the exact same connotation as '*ed*', and even the verb form of *martys* has the same connotations as '*ud*'.

You have probably guessed by the use of the word *martys* that the English word *martyr* is derived from this same word. We think of a martyr as someone who gives his life for a cause. They talk a lot about Muslim martyrs these days, because the terrorists think that they are giving themselves up for their cause as they blow themselves up and take many with them. The Greek meaning of *martys*, however, which is the one that is found in the Bible, is more often "one who gives testimony," "one who provides proof," "one who tells what he knows or has seen."

Therefore, most of the time when we look in the Bible and see the words *witness*, *testimony*, *testimonies*, *testify*, and all of their forms, it is better for us to take *martys* in its judicial or legal form first before trying to add other definitions to it. These men who wrote the Bible were using real, common language that they understood from their own life and culture, and they used it in a religious sense. Although sometimes the meaning changed a bit, if we go back to the basic meaning, we get the strong underlying connotation of the word. That is the first thing we should do when we come across these words. They are not necessarily talking about someone who dies for a cause but someone who gives testimony, someone who provides proof, someone who is an eyewitness of something and can tell what it was that happened.

Please go back to the book of Ruth, and we will start here. We are going to read the first several verses of chapter 4. This is the incident where Boaz redeems Ruth and the property of Elimelech, and

this theme is typical of the Hebrew concept of witnessing. I could really expand that to say that this scene is typical of the universal concept of witnessing.

Ruth 4:1-4 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend, sit down here." So he came aside and sat down. And he [Boaz] took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. Then he said to the close relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. [Actually, he was probably not a brother, but a cousin.] And I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it."

The near kinsman here is saying, "OK, sounds like a good deal. I will go ahead and buy the land."

Ruth 4:5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."

He essentially says, "But there is a string attached! The fine print says that if you redeem this land, you must take the woman, and your first child together is going to be the heir of that property."

Ruth 4:6 And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Boaz may have been a bit tricky about all this and have gotten the land and Ruth because he backed the guy into a corner.

Ruth 4:7-8 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel. Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." So he took off his sandal.

This seems somewhat strange compared to today. "OK, here is my shoe..."

Ruth 4:9-11 And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day." And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses."

As I said, this scene is typical of how, not only the Hebrews, but everyone has used the idea of witnessing. These 10 elders of the city—and, if you read between the lines there in verse 11, all the people who were drawn to this scene that Boaz set up—observed the negotiations and the transaction of the sandal between Boaz and the unnamed near kinsman. If there were ever a need for proof that Boaz had indeed gone through all of this and jumped through all the legal hoops through which he

needed to jump to procure the land of Elimelech and the hand of Ruth, he had ten expert, irrefutable witnesses from among the elders of the people.

In fact, we can go on to say that he had probably dozens more who had seen all this take place because it most likely took place at the gate of the city. More people were probably able to see it, and everything was above board. In a way, these were like notaries who witness something and put their seal on it and sign it, which says that, "Yes, I indeed saw this transaction take place, legally and above board, etc." This is how witnessing is done, and this is how many, if not most, of the occurrences of *'ed* and *'ud* in the Old Testament connote.

I find what happened here in chapter 4 very interesting as kind of a side note. Actually, it is not a side note; it leads right into my next point, and that is the fact that Boaz is a type of Christ. Boaz here chooses ten elders—Jews—respected men of the town. Remember that since this took place in Bethlehem, these Jews were probably kin of David. In fact, Boaz was David's great-grandfather, but these were all people who were one big extended family, the family of Judah. Boaz took ten of them, ten men whose eyewitness testimony could not be gainsaid in any way, and these men then witnessed his redemption of the land and Ruth.

What is interesting to me is that Jesus did exactly the same thing, except He chose twelve men of Judah, men of Galilee. They would do the same for Him to show that He had indeed redeemed His people. Turn to Luke 24 and see that this is exactly what He did. While the normal legal idea of witnessing appears in the New Testament, Jesus makes use of it to confirm the facts of His life and His death to the whole world, and that is exactly what occurred.

Luke 24:44-49 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Now let us go forward to Acts 1, where this is basically continued. Starting in verse 4, He told them to tarry for a while, which simply means to wait—wait in Jerusalem:

Acts 1:4-5 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

This fits in perfectly with the Feast of Pentecost.

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

What we see happening here is the commission of the apostles that they had witnessed for three and a half years Christ's pretty much every waking action. They probably watched Him sleep, too. They heard His words; they saw His actions. They saw everything that He did. They saw how He was railroaded at His trial. They saw how He was killed cruelly, and they saw that He was put into the tomb—but they also saw that He rose from the dead, and they saw Him several times between the time that He rose from the dead and the time that He finally ascended to heaven in the cloud, as it talks about in the next several verses.

They had seen for three and a half years, plus a bit more, everything that Jesus did. They had seen everything that He had gone through. They had talked to His mother; they had talked to His brothers. They *knew* Him. Some of them were His own cousins. Other people in Galilee were aware of Joseph and Mary and Jesus and all His brothers and sisters. They were intimately aware of everything that had happened in Jesus' life.

Once all that was done and completed—the redemption was successful; the Bride was won, in essence (going back to Boaz in my thoughts)—then He sent out His twelve witnesses and said, "You have seen all this. You are irreproachable; your testimony cannot be gainsaid in any way. Go out and tell everybody in Jerusalem; then tell everybody in Judea and Samaria; and then go out and tell the entire world." That is what they did.

We should go on here to Acts 10. I want to pick this up here because this is where the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles and Cornelius and his family became members of the church.

Acts 10:34-37 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached. . ."

He shows how indeed what Jesus commanded them to do was indeed being done in the first several years after Jesus' ascension into heaven, and it had been preached throughout all Judea and Galilee.

Acts 10:38 ". . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

They preached about what Christ did and what Christ said. That was their witness.

Acts 10:39-43 "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

We see here that in his first sermon to these Gentiles, Peter basically preached the fact that they were His witnesses, that it was their job to do this, and that this is what they preached. In a way, he gave

them an overview of the work of the church—the work of the apostles—which was to go out to Judea, to Samaria, and to all the world, telling these exact same things: what they had seen, what they had heard, what Jesus had gone through all those years, and that He was raised the third day and lives now.

Of course, they can then go on and tell not only those things but also all the things that He had done since then through the Holy Spirit and through them: the healings, the callings, the demons which were cast out, the doors opened, etc. That was all part of the witnessing, because their testimony did not stop with His ascension to heaven. It continues because Jesus continues. He continues to work, and His works are seen among men and, therefore, can be verified and repeated as a witness.

You might say, then, that Jesus chose a jury of twelve men to observe everything that He did, even through His death and afterward; and then they were to proclaim what they had witnessed to the Jews and to the Gentiles—basically the whole world. Of this they did a really whiz-bang job!

You might want to jot down Acts 17:6. There is a man there that "accuses" them of turning the world upside down. This is specifically talking about Paul and whoever was traveling with him at the time, but Paul was one of those witnesses called specifically to witness before Israelites, Gentiles, kings, and whomever else God sent him. He was an apostle born out of due time, but he did the same thing. All of them were just magnificent in the job that they were given to do.

If you want to see exactly how it worked, you have to go to the book of I John, chapter 1, where John tells you exactly what it was that they did. He starts this particular epistle like this so that they could have his credentials right away.

I John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon. . .

Look at that! He is so emphatic! "We heard it," he says. "We saw it with our eyes." Then he says, "We looked upon it." He is a Hebrew, and the Hebrews had a way of saying things more than once for emphasis. He is trying to convey the idea that, yes indeed, they were actually there and saw these things with their own peepers. It is not just something that they just heard about. Yes, they did hear things, but they saw them, and they saw them. He goes on:

I John 1:1 . . . and our hands have handled. . .

This was not a figment or vision. It was something that they could grab onto and did.

I John 1:1-4 . . . concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen [here again!], and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested [a second mention] to us [it was made to appear]—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Notice how emphatic he was about his job—his duty—to God and Jesus Christ as an eyewitness. He strove very mightily to make sure that we understood that he actually was there. He saw Him; he heard Him; he saw Him; he felt Him; he saw Him; He was manifested to him; etc.

See how many times he makes sure that we understand that this was real. It really happened. This is what made the twelve apostles so special. That is why that there are no apostles like them anymore: They were the only ones who actually saw, heard, and touched. Not only that, several of them saw Jesus Christ in His glorified state—not just the state that He was in after His resurrection, which was wonderful enough—but some of them saw Him transfigured on the Mount, and Paul said that he saw into the third heaven at one time. They were special men. They were His jury, as I called them before—those special witnesses of His who told the whole world what they saw and turned it all upside down in doing so.

Just think about it. The last two millennia have been driven by the testimony of those twelve or thirteen men (counting Paul) because the great powers of the time of those two thousand years have been so-called Christian nations. It is the Western civilization built on Judeo-Christian values that has driven this world. It was not necessarily the true religion found in the Bible, but it was what did start with the true witness of these men. They truly did turn the world upside down.

They devoted their whole lives to this one activity: to testify to anyone who would listen of what Jesus did, what Jesus said, and what it means for us. They were willing to take this to the grave if need be. They all suffered, and most of them died horrible deaths so that they could give their testimony.

It is in the book of Revelation that the idea of a martyr really comes into its fullness. There is a bit of it elsewhere, but it is mostly in Revelation that martyrs, in terms of dying for the faith, really come out.

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Eventually, most of Christianity began to think of witnessing in this regard: that people would take what they knew of God and say it publicly, and it would get them into trouble with the authorities. The authorities would then persecute them, arrest them, imprison them, and then torture and kill them. This they did, as it says here, "for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God." This is how, as time progressed into the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth centuries, that the idea of martyrdom came into the church. Thus, we have books like Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, which tells us of thousands of people who died because of their witness to their faith.

This aspect of witnessing of God has made some saints partake of it, but it is not the whole story. In fact, as I said earlier, you need to think of the word *martus*—also '*ed*' and '*ud*'—in its original sense of "giving proof of something" or "being an eyewitness of something." That is its first meaning. This meaning of a martyr, of one dying for a cause, comes in only by extension. That is the ultimate in witnessing: giving one's life for one's faith. We need to think of it first and foremost as giving eyewitness testimony or giving proof.

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Revelation 12:10-11 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

In Luke 21, He talks about the fifth seal:

Luke 21:12-15 [Jesus says,] "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist."

Notice here that they are saying something. Usually that is a vital part of any kind of witnessing. It does not have to be but usually it is.

Luke 21:16-19 "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. [There is witnessing by an action.] And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls."

You might say, "you will save your spiritual life through your perseverance."

In these four passages that we have just read—Revelation 20:4; 6:9; 12:10-11; and Luke 21:12-19—I see three common elements: the word, the testimony, and martyrdom. I think that this is easiest to see in verse 9 of Revelation 6:

Revelation 6:9 . . . the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

We have martyrdom, the Word of God, and the testimony.

I think the element of the Word of God is clear. As a matter of fact, the idea of martyrdom—death for a cause—is clear, too. The Word of God is very clear. It is God's revelation. It is the truth. It is what we have written in the pages of the Book. These people were slain for this reason: that they believed the Word of God.

Unlike many people today—unlike many Christians, even—these martyrs do not take the word of God for granted. They believe that the message is personally vital, current, and authoritative; and they are willing to die rather than compromise with its instruction. They know what the Word of God says; they believe what the Word of God says; and they do what the Word of God says—come hell or high water, as it were. It does not matter what the world is saying; it does not matter what their family is saying. These people take the Word of God at face value and do it. To them, the Word of God is itself a cause, and they value it like gold. It is treasure to them. It is something worth dying for.

The other element, the testimony that they held, refers to the witness that they made: what they testified of, you might say; what they witnessed of. As I mentioned before, most of the time it is transmitted through speech. Preachers preach. People talk, and that is the testimony that they give. They either preach it as one of God's ministers, or they tell others about their experiences with God.

We are well known for doing this. Usually when we meet somebody for the first time at the Feast or Sabbath services, it is not long before we are witnessing to him—even though he is in the church of God! Do you know how we do that? One of the first questions usually is, "How did you come into the church?" What we are telling each other is, "This is how God jolted me out of my stupidity," or "This is how He introduced me to the truth," or "This is how He cleaned me up," or "This is how and where and when He put me into the thick of things in the church of God, and such and such has happened to me over these last several years." It is all attributed to what God has done. We witness to each other a lot.

We do not do this often to the people of the world because they just are not interested. They do not care how we got involved in this way of life. Usually if they do, it turns into a "circus side-show" to them, purely for entertainment. At other times, there are ways that we can witness to the world through speech, just as to lay members, by simply telling of things that have happened in our lives; and we can attribute them to God, which is right and good because He was certainly the One behind the events. Whether it falls on deaf ears or not is no matter. You have testified. You have given your testimony of the things that God has done with and for and to you. What God does with it is up to Him. You have given your testimony.

Notice that I have not said anything about somebody pointing a gun at you or holding a knife to your throat or showing you the nice pile of wood with a stake in the middle or putting you on a rack or anything else like that. This is the normal everyday type of witnessing that the Bible may not directly talk about, but which it implies frequently.

Usually, however, our witnessing is done non-verbally. This may be the most effective of all. Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the Gospel at all times; and if necessary, use words." You have also heard people say, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one anytime," because usually somebody's actions are much easier to understand than speech. They hit us harder when you see somebody doing right.

Just think of it. Think of what Jesus did when He was talking to His disciples and they watched the widow put her two mites in. They did also see the other people putting in their loads of treasure, by comparison. What she did spoke volumes. She could have said to them, "Oh! I can only give two mites," but that would not have done anything to them. However, when they saw her do it, and they saw her poverty and the comparison between what she did and what the others did, it preached a sermon like no other. Do you see what I am getting at? Our best witnessing is often done through our behavior.

For instance, perhaps our most universal, non-verbal witness among true Christians is keeping the Sabbath. It is the sign that sets us apart from everyone else. All you have to do is get into your "Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes" on Saturday, and you tell everybody that you are different. In addition, you point them to the One who says in Exodus 20, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," the same One who made the worlds.

We all do this. You may not have known that you were witnessing. Most of the time we do not realize it. That is good, because if we are going about living our life in a way that is right and good, it does not matter whether we are aware of it or not; it is going to make an impression on those who see you. If you give somebody help, such as walking an old lady across the street, she is going to think either that you are really a Christian or that you have been through the Boy Scouts. Let God work with it as He will.

Do you see what I mean? It is in just our normal everyday activity that we make a witness for God. One need not tell an observer of you a word. Our actions on the Sabbath day—and, one would hope, every day of the week—are a megaphone to the world that we are indeed different, that God has chosen us out of this world and made us to be His children. It has made us everything that we are, and thus we reflect Him.

We can make a witness in our families, too, even though they may already be in the church of God. Because we are not all running at the same pace, something that we do may witness to somebody else in the church that there is a better way of doing something. Then he will say, "Oh! So that's how it's done!" Therefore, he is made a better Christian by it.

We can do it in our adherence to law in our public activities, such as how we drive our cars or whether we pay our taxes and how we go about doing that. Maybe our diligence and thoroughness on our job testify of our godly character—or maybe a lack thereof. Everything we say and everything that we do, anything that any other person sees us doing or saying shouts out our testimony.

The final phrase back there in Revelation 6:9 said, ". . . which they held. . ." It was not just the testimony that they gave; it is the testimony that they held. It gives you the idea that they were holding on as strongly as they could, grasping this testimony with all their strength. This phrase adds definition and emphasis to their testimony, meaning that the testimony that these witnesses gave meant something to them. They valued it. It was not simply testifying about some mundane matter like the details of a purse snatching that you many have seen at the mall or a fender-bender that you happened to witness.

Their testimony is so precious that they hold it fast. They bear it. They maintain it. They keep it in trust. They believe it. They adhere to it with all their worth. As I have mentioned before, it is something that they consciously undertake. You might call it a divine duty, a solemn charge by God to apprise the world of this way of life. However, they are not out there blaring it. They are living it. Sometimes they do have to say something, but most of the time they live the sermon instead of preaching it.

I do not know if you have ever looked at witnessing this way, but if you would, please go back to Exodus 20. There are actually two commandments that touch on our witness. There are more, obviously, in that they really all do, but it is direct in verses 7 and 16, the third and ninth commandments. If you really understand what the third commandment actually tells us to do, then you can understand how it fits into witnessing.

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Meaning, we are to bear God's name and all that it represents in a worthy manner. If we fail to do that, God holds it against us.

Here it is in the Decalogue, the Big Ten. God gives us a charge to bear His name before the world in a way that is worthy. Do not be futile, you might say, in how you carry His name. Remember, we have been baptized into that name: It is now *our* name. When we think of God's names—and He has many of them—they all describe Him in one way or another: His character, His eternity, His faithfulness, and on they go. All of these things have an impact upon us, and how we act, then, reflects on that name.

Exodus 20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

This brings it down more into the human plane, but the same thing in principle applies. We are not to lie about anything to our neighbor, another human being; and we certainly should not be lying about the nature of God, or the promises of God, or anything of God that He has given to us to witness or testify to everyone who sees us. Thus, we see here that two commandments impact upon our witness: God says not to take His name in vain, and He says to never bear false witness.

Paul warns against this in Romans. He is speaking directly to the Jews, but he is writing to the church of God. Just understand it that way; he means us.

Romans 2:17-24 Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

Obviously, he is talking to Jews who had come from Judaism and who did indeed boast in the law; but this applies to us just as well, because we believe in the law, too. We do not believe in it in the same way that the Jews did, but we believe that the law is our guide to life. If you say, "Do not steal," do you steal?

What he does not mention here? "You who say, 'Do not bear false witness,'" do you bear false witness? I am not just talking about lying. I am talking about the subject of this sermon.

Let us go back, while we are on this idea of the Israelites and the law, to Isaiah 43. This chapter also needs a bit of explanation. What God has done here through this poetry of Isaiah 43 is draw the whole world into a mammoth court case—and God is on trial.

Isaiah 43:8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears.

These are the people in the world.

Isaiah 43:9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, "It is truth."

God is saying, "Bring in the whole world. Let them bring their witnesses so that they can testify about their gods and their way of life." We will see at the end of this what they finally decide.

Isaiah 43:10-13 "You [Israel] are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God. Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"

God calls Israel as His witnesses. He had chosen them specifically out of the world, had given them His law, and had allowed them to know Him: "You [Israel] are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me."

Look at all that He did. He gave them the law. Through so many miracles—the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, water in the desert, manna six days a week, leading them across the desert by the pillar of cloud and fire—time and time again, He showed them who He was, how He worked, and what He expected of them. They got to know Him and should have believed Him. That was ultimately what He was shooting for. However, we know from Hebrews 3 and 4 that they never did actually have any faith. They did not believe Him, and they did not obey.

They were to be His witnesses before the world, letting the whole world know that He was very God. He was the only God. He was the only Lord. He was the only Savior. He was the only One who could say something and make it come to pass just as He said it would. If He, as He says here, snatched someone up, there was no one who could deliver that person out of His hand. That is in verse 13. He says, "If I have something that I want to do, no one is going to reverse it."

This is what Israel's duty was. As mentioned before, it was their divine responsibility, being called in this manner, to do this before the world for God. They were to testify through their speech and behavior and in no way misrepresent the truth about God. That is what they were told to do, but they did not. They bound themselves to it, and that is why God had every right to do what He did to Israel.

We could go back to Exodus 19 and show the response where they agreed and then Exodus 24, where they agreed again, but let us go to Joshua 24. This is at the end of Joshua's life. He had just given them a long speech about what he had done and how he had been faithful and that he and his family will continue to serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD. . .

What was that he said? "You cannot serve the Lord!" He knew something that they did not. Why?

Joshua 24:19 . . . for He is a holy God [and you Israelites are a bunch of miserable sinners!]. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins."

He was speaking the truth.

Joshua 24:20-25 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good [which is exactly what happened.] And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD! So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!" Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!" So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Three times Israel said, "We will do this." They bound themselves. Guess what happens next. The book of Judges. It is the bloodiest book in the Bible. It is the one full of Israel's rebellions up to the time of Samuel. They could not do it. They could not be the witnesses that God wanted them to be and knew that they would not be, but it is what they were supposed to do.

However, there were a few that did it right. There were a few that God chose for certain jobs throughout this time; they did witness for God; and their deeds are recorded in the Bible. There is a succinct list of these in Hebrews 11, which we call the Faith Chapter. It gives multiple examples of the heroes of faith making a witness for the true God and His way.

We will just go through some: Abel bore witness by making an acceptable sacrifice. Enoch's translation was witness that he pleased God. Noah's obedience in constructing the ark bore witness to his faith. Abraham testified of his allegiance in many ways: He left Ur of the Chaldees; he dwelt in tents in Canaan; he sacrificed Isaac on the altar. These are all ways in which he witnessed of God.

Sarah testified by conceiving and bearing the promised son. The patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all witnessed for God in the work that He gave them to do. Moses showed his faith by refusing royal rank; he forsook Egypt; and he kept the Passover; and many other things. As a nation, as the author says in verse 30, they bore witness by marching around Jericho. Even Rehab the harlot left a testimony of God by helping the Israelite spies at Jericho.

Paul goes on to say toward the end of this passage, specifically verse 39, that all the heroes of faith obtained good testimony through their works. They all left an example to us of how we can witness, and they are called, then, in chapter 12:1, "a great cloud of witnesses." They are the ones who have left their testimony for our admonition—for our following in their footsteps.

This burden, as Paul implies in Romans 9 through 11, as well as in calling the church of God "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16, has been lifted off Israel in a major way and given to the church of God. We can take what is said there in Isaiah 43 as being instruction for us: "You are My witnesses," says the Lord.

Acts 1:8 (read up above), "you shall be witnesses of Me," makes this binding upon the apostles—and what is binding on the apostles has thus been transferred to the church of God to do. You will see in Matthew 24 that this continues all the way up to the end. This is one of those verses that Mr. Armstrong read literally thousands of times. We should know this one by heart:

Matthew 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

It is unfortunate that so many people have narrowed the preaching of the Gospel down to having a television or radio program. You can preach the Gospel by being a true Christian. It is all part and parcel of preaching the Gospel. When you speak and when you behave, you are in a small way preaching the Gospel, whether you knew it or not, because someone is observing you. Whether they see a true Christian or whether they see something that "causes the 'Gentiles' to blaspheme" is up to you. It is preaching the Gospel, because through His servants God gives a witness to the world of the way that life should be lived.

I want to go to two commands. The first one is in I Peter 2. I want to take a command from Peter and then one from Paul. These are only two among scores concerning our ability now that we have been called and are empowered by God's Holy Spirit to make an impression on the world by our conduct or behavior. Peter writes:

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Peter commands, first of all, to eliminate any kind of carnality. Then he says to display honorable conduct, and he later goes on to call that good works. It sounds like my sermons two and three in this series, which I gave during the Days of Unleavened Bread: "Conquering Sin," and "Growing in Righteousness."

Paul writes:

Philippians 2:12-16 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Paul calls the same activity that Peter talked about "working out your own salvation." He quickly says that God assists us in this. What we do, then, is God's good pleasure or, we might say, what pleases Him. That is making a witness. If we do what God wants—what pleases God with the aid that He gives us through His Spirit—we are witnessing. That is what it is.

As Paul hints by the words that he uses here, he says that it boils down to submission to God, obedience, and doing His work. That is what our witness entails. While we do these things without complaint or argument, it works for our good. We become blameless. We become harmless or innocent—morally pure.

See? It not only does something for those who see, but it also does something for us. While we are doing our good works, while we are doing those things that please God, while we are witnessing, we are growing in character and being sanctified. Thus, in the day of Christ, everything is going to be okay. That will please Paul, too, for all the work that he did to get them to this point. See how it all works together?

Let us close, then, in Matthew 5, and get this directly from our Savior's mouth. He does not use the word, but what He says is exactly what I have been talking about throughout this whole sermon. He says right at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. [Here is the command:] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Without using the word directly, our Savior commands us to be witnesses of Him and His way of life, like bright lights gleaming from a hilltop on a dark night. That sort of thing cannot be hidden. It is going to be seen. If the right people see it—if God moves them to see it—it will lead them to that City on the Hill, and they then can become bright lights as well.

In the every day course of life that we do this, we should shine brightly through good works and godly behavior, bringing glory to God and the Father. Is it not interesting and very significant that the very next thing that Jesus does is to give a long discourse on God's law? He magnifies it and shows the spirit of the law. It is as though He is saying, "Let your light so shine before men, and this is how it is done."

Now, to the Christian living principles of imitating Christ, conquering sin, growing in righteousness, and being living sacrifices, we have added witnessing of God.