The United States government has a Federal Witness Protection Program to protect those who testify against organized crime when they are in danger of being killed or harmed by the accused person or organization. These witnesses provide proof—either in the form of written material or their own verbal testimony—regarding what transpired relating to the perpetrated crime.

When a person is placed in the witness protection program, the government provides him with a completely new identity. The witness, his wife and any children receive new individual names, as well as a new family name. They move into a new house in another part of the country or world, depending on the power and reach of the criminal's organization. The witness' occupation is usually changed, or they are given a new business to manage. In extreme cases, they may even have their looks altered by plastic surgery.

The witness' testimony is so important to the prosecutor that the government will pour a great amount of money and effort into his protection both before and after the trial. It is such an extensive program that 200 people each year enter it, and the U.S. government spends at least $58 million per year to keep these people safe. Some estimates run as high as $100 million yearly. Since the program is cloaked in such secrecy, no one knows for sure how much is actually spent.

Ironically, many of these protected witnesses are more dangerous than the individuals they put behind bars. Many have perjured their testimony to get into the program. It is safe to say that the character of the witnesses leaves much to be desired. At least 20 people have been murdered by individuals in the program. A Senate hearing on January 8, 1996, found that 1 of every 4 people enrolled in the program commit a crime while in it.

The witness protection program is a fiasco. The reliability and accuracy of the witnesses make their testimonies useless for true justice. The real value of a witness depends upon the faithfulness and truth of his testimony.

What is a witness? Today, the word "witness" is acceptable as a synonym for the verb "see," though it is infrequently used in this way. "Witness" is preferred when one's presence to observe an act is formal or legally necessary, or when one's observation is likely to be the basis of subsequent testimony. For example, one sees a new model automobile, but one witnesses an accident. So a witness is one who sees an event and can report it to others.

**Old Testament Usage**

In the Old Testament the word "witness" is derived from the Hebrew root word, ed, meaning "to repeat or re-assert." Similar to our usage today, the Old Testament word or its compounds are used primarily in two ways:

1) "Witness" means evidence (e.g., Severe damage witnessed to the destructive force of the storm).
2) "Witness" means *the person who testifies* (e.g., The witness to the robbery took the stand).

The Old Testament shows several examples of "witness" meaning *evidence* or *proof*. Some witnesses were in writing. A legal divorce had to be accompanied by a written document (Deuteronomy 24:1, 3; Isaiah 50:1), and in civil contracts around the 6th and 7th century BC, documentary evidence was required and carefully preserved, as when Jeremiah bought the field from his cousin Hanameel (Jeremiah 32:10-16).

Some witnesses were not in writing. Abraham gave seven ewe-lambs to Abimelech as evidence or a witness of his ownership of the well of Beersheba (Genesis 21:30-31). Jacob raised a heap of stones as a boundary mark or witness between himself and Laban (Genesis 31:44, 52). The tribes of Reuben and Gad built an altar as a witness to the covenant between themselves and the other tribes (Joshua 22:10-34). Joshua set up a stone as a witness of Israel's promised allegiance to God (Joshua 24:26-27).

In contrast, witnesses can signify evil. Idols witness to the worthlessness of the false gods they represent (Isaiah 44:9). Job claims his wrinkles witness of God's wrath against him (Job 16:8).

The other type of Old Testament witness is *the person who witnesses* or can testify for others for legal purposes. The law generally required evidence for all its infractions and legal transactions.

Israelite law contained special conditions with respect to evidence from witnesses. At least two witnesses were required to establish any accusation (Deuteronomy 17:6). In the case of a wife suspected of adultery, evidence besides the husband's was required (Numbers 5:13). A witness who withheld the truth shared in the guilt of the offense (Leviticus 5:1). Slanderous reports and meddlesome witnesses were forbidden (Exodus 20:16; 23:1), and the witnesses were the first executioners (Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7).

The testimony of a witness in the Old Testament was a very serious matter. A judge was required to verify it by the testimony of at least one other witness. If a witness was found to be unreliable and false, he received the same penalty that the accused would have received had he been found guilty.

**New Testament Usage**

In the New Testament, the word "witness" is derived from the various forms of the Greek word *martus*, which means "record," "report," "evidence given" or "testimony." It is someone who can testify or vouch for the parties in debate. As in English, it means one who bears testimony in a judicial sense or one who can testify to the truth of what he has seen or known. As in the Old Testament, the witnesses were the first executioners (Acts 7:58), and at least two witnesses were required to establish any charge (II Corinthians 13:1). Within the church, an accusation against a minister was only received if it was from two or three witnesses (I Timothy 5:19).

In the New Testament, a witness takes on the more personal form of "one who attests his belief in Christ and His teachings by personal suffering." The apostles frequently appear as witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:46-48). The faithful are called "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). Revelation 6:9 speaks of "those who had been slain for the testimony which they held."
From *martus* we get the English word "martyr," that is, one who, amidst great sufferings or by his death, bears witness to the truth. A martyr is one who is so confident of the truth, and so upright, that he would rather give his life than deny the truth of what he has seen and known. Paul mentions Stephen's witness and martyrdom in Acts 22:20 as an example of this kind of witness.

In the letter to the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14), Jesus Himself is referred to as "the Faithful and True Witness" (*martys*). None of the other letters to the seven churches uses this title. Christ emphasizes His own *faithful and true* character because the Laodiceans so completely lack these two qualities. Christ's example shows that to be a fitting witness of God, one must be *faithful and true*, that is, spiritually reliable and accurate. A true witness of God is a reflected example of the life of Jesus Christ in word and behavior.

**Two Witnesses**

In Revelation 11, during the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, John describes the Two Witnesses as having God-given power to witness and, if need be, call fire down from heaven to destroy their enemies. While they preach God's last warning to the human and demonic powers of earth just before the final Trumpet sounds, God gives them supernatural protection.

Before the start of their 3½-year commission, the Two Witnesses will already have been witnessing by their *example* and through their *preaching*. They will already be producing good works. God will inspire them to utter a specific message directed at the descendants of Israel and the rest of the world, indicting the world of sin.

Revelation 11:3 says:

> And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.

The word "power" is not in the Greek text, which simply reads, "I will give to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy. . . ." Paraphrased, God says, "I will grant to My Two Witnesses the right or power of prophesying during the time specified." Translators must add a word like "power," "privilege," "opportunity," or "boldness" to complete the sense in English.

The meaning is not that God would send two witnesses to prophesy, but that they are existing witnesses who receive additional gifts and powers. During that time God will give them the privilege and the strength to proclaim the truth that they will be commissioned to communicate as His "witnesses" to mankind.

The phrase "and they will prophesy" does not necessarily mean that they would predict future events, but that they would proclaim the truth as God had revealed it. The indication here is that the Two Witnesses would publicly preach or maintain the truth before the world.

God promises protection to those who obey Him, provided it is His will. Some of the faithful are given the spiritual strength to be martyred, and others are protected from such unpleasantness. God decides for His own purpose how he wants us to represent Him. Revelation 11:5 describes part of God's witness protection program, "If anyone wants to harm [the Two Witnesses], fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies." Christ is reliable and true. Not a hair of our head is affected without His approval.
The Church's Witness

In Revelation 12:11, John records that the saints overcome Satan by the blood of Christ, shed for the forgiveness of our sins, and by the word of their testimony. In the Kingdom of God, the saints will continue to be witnesses of God's way of life. We are all witnesses of something, and we continue to witness as long as we exist or are remembered.

As a unified and cumulative force—as the Church—what do we witness or testify for God?

1. We witness that He is God. Isaiah 43:10, 12 says, speaking of spiritual Israel, the church: "You are My witnesses, . . . that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. . . . Therefore you are My witnesses,' says the Lord, 'that I am God'" (see Isaiah 44:8).
2. We testify that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:5).
3. We proclaim that God the Father raised up Jesus to be Prince and Savior (Acts 5:30-32).
4. We show that Christ was ordained by God the Father to be Judge (Acts 10:40-42).
5. We declare that through Christ's name whoever believes in and obeys Him will be forgiven of sin (Acts 10:43).
6. We testify to man repentance toward God the Father and faith toward Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).
7. We announce the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14).

These scriptures are a summary of God's sovereignty, Jesus Christ's role and our part in God's overall plan.

We are individually and collectively to witness by our works that our God is God! Our good or bad witness is made because we are producing good or bad works. Good works will glorify God—if we are a reliable and accurate witness of His way of life.

We have a tremendous individual responsibility to witness for God by our example. As one writer put it, "Witnessing is not a spare-time occupation or a once-a-week activity. It must be a quality of life. You do not go witnessing, you are a witness."

Remember the well-known saying, "I can't hear what you are saying because your actions speak so loudly"? In this vein, Paul Gilbert expressed the right principle of personal witnessing in a poem:

You write a sermon,
a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say;
Men read what you write,
if it's false or it's true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you?