

The Testimony of God. . . .

IS IT YOUR CHIEF INTEREST?

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IS IT YOUR CHIEF INTEREST ?

NO subject calls for more serious and prayerful consideration on our part than that of the testimony of God. It is the subject of God's great interest and of Satan's bitter hostility on the earth at the present time. It should be our chief interest; like the true soldier, who would rather die than give up the colours, so we should be prepared to suffer and die rather than surrender the testimony of God. We are often inclined to put man's things before God's things; many a servant has missed his way through making man's salvation and blessing his chief interest instead of the testimony of God. Doubtless the testimony of God carries with it salvation and blessing for men, but it makes all the difference whether God's glory or man's blessing has the first place in our minds. As far as I see there are only two things on earth which are of any great interest to God, viz., His testimony and His assembly. In 1 Cor. the apostle speaks of the testimony of God and the assembly of God. Until Paul went to Corinth with the testimony of God, there was nothing for God there. The assembly was formed by the testimony and became the vessel of it, the vessel of light to men. Everything of God here is maintained by testimony until the coming of the Lord, when all will be manifested and displayed in glory.

From the beginning God has graciously given testimony to men, He has not left Himself without witness nor left man without light. First there was the testimony of creation (Ps. xix. 1-6; Acts xvii. 24-29; Rom. i. 19, 20). Then there was the

NOTE.—Many of the scripture quotations in this paper are from the translation by J. N. D.

testimony of His providential goodness (Acts xiv. 17). Then again there was the testimony of His word (Gen. xiv. 14, 15 ; Ps. xix. 7, 8 ; 2 Pet. i. 21). This last was fully expressed in the Word, the Son of God become man and dwelling among us (Jno. i. 1, 2, 14 ; Heb. i. 1, 2). The testimony of God at the present time is the gospel in its largest sense, the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of the glory of God ; it may be summed up in the words " the Christ." The present testimony embraces every previous testimony, all that had been revealed of God in the past. All has been preserved in the Scriptures, and is now maintained livingly in the power of the Spirit (Jno. v. 39 ; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). The present testimony may be considered in two parts : first, that which was spoken and set forth in Christ on earth ; and secondly, that which has been spoken by Christ from heaven through His apostles. Both are now maintained here by the Holy Spirit (Jno. xv. 26 ; xvi. 13). It is important to remember that God is still speaking, that there is a divine person here on earth, who is not silent but makes His voice heard for those who have ears to hear (Heb. iii. 7, 15 ; iv. 11, 12 ; Rev. ii. 7), etc. This is so real that unbelievers coming into the assembly and hearing the prophetic word should acknowledge that God is indeed here (1 Cor. xiv. 25). The great object of the testimony of Christ here was to make God known, to reveal Him as the Father, so that those receiving His testimony set to their seal that God is true, and came to know the Father, and to enjoy eternal life in the knowledge of the Father and the Son (Jno. iii. 31-34 ; xiv. 9, 10 ; xvii. 3). I say, came to do so, because all this was made good to them when the Spirit came (Jno. xiv. 20). In 1 Jno. v. we get the other side of the truth, the Father bearing witness to the Son, and to His grace to us in the Son ; he that believes the testimony has the witness in himself, the testimony is verified in him, so that he knows consciously that he has eternal life. The whole

truth is now revealed and subsists livingly in Christ glorified. He is the truth, and the Spirit bears testimony to Him.

The testimony is spoken of in three ways: (1) It is the testimony of God, He is the source of it; it is God's testimony, not man's (1 Cor. ii. 1; 1 Thess. ii. 9, 13). God is speaking in His Son and by His Spirit (Heb. i. 1; iii. 7). (2) It is the testimony of Christ, He is the subject of it. God has nothing to testify of but Christ, the gospel is the glad tidings of the Christ, of the glory of Christ (Rom. i. 1; xv. 19; 2 Cor. ii. 12; iv. 4). God has revealed Himself in Christ, and set forth His purpose livingly in Christ glorified. Moreover, He has established in Him everything necessary for the giving effect to His purpose now and hereafter,—in the church, in Israel and in the nations, in heaven and upon earth. Christ is the Man of God's purpose, the Man of His right hand, the One whom He has made strong for Himself. (3) It is the testimony of the Lord, it is in the administration of Jesus as Lord. He is in the place of authority and power, and He is exercising His power to maintain the testimony of God here in the presence of Satan's power and man's wilful hostility to all that is of God. This was a great reality to the apostle. In the presence of the hostility of men and the defection of the saints, he found his resource in the Lord. When we see the Lord in the place of power, we can be quiet and patient in the presence of opposition, for we know that man cannot prevail against the Lord, and that He will maintain the testimony of God against the power of evil here. It is a great thing, therefore, to see that the testimony is in the administration of the Lord; hence it must be preserved and be victorious in the end. What is maintained in testimony now will soon be displayed in glory.

What the apostle speaks of as the "word of the cross" (1 Cor. i. 18) is an essential part of the testimony of God. The new starting-point in the ways

of God is the bringing in of another Man, a second Man, One in whom He has found all that is after His own heart, One who has been proved to be morally perfect and capable of doing all God's will. He is the Anointed Man, the Head, in whom God will establish all His purpose. But before this could be brought to pass, sin must be judged, and the man that was already under judgment must be removed by judgment, the ground must be cleared, and a righteous foundation laid, before God could begin to build up another world of Himself and in another Man. In the cross the man according to flesh, the Adam man, came under judgment in the One who died for all, and has been removed from before God, so that God could say, "The end of all flesh is come before me." Yet at the same time mankind has been preserved in the One who bore the judgment and has survived it, "being put to death in flesh but quickened in the Spirit, who is gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God." This we see set forth figuratively in the flood. Thus the cross has cleared the ground, and now all that is *of God* is *in Christ*. This new system which God is building will abide for eternity, and will be filled by Christ; it all springs from Him, He is the Head and Centre of it, so that nothing that is of the first man can enter into it. Noah coming out of the ark and offering his burnt-offering is a figure of Christ going back to God in all the value and sweet savour of what He had done in glorifying God here, in vindicating Him in the presence of sin and Satan's power. Noah figuratively was the head, the beginning of a new world, and his family was blessed in him. It is impossible to understand what God is doing if we do not understand the true import of the cross, all the glory of man brought down into the dust of death, that Christ may fill everything, and so make everything answer to the glory of God. Paul was in the truth of this when he said, "For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save *Jesus Christ*, and him *crucified*."

Now God has not only raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to glory, but He has also established in Him everything that is necessary for the accomplishment of all His purposes, as also for our salvation and blessing. The testimony is the gospel of the glory of Christ, of all that God has established in Him in glory. On the day of Pentecost Peter declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead, and made Him both Lord and Christ, and in Acts x. 36, he adds that "He is Lord of all," thus opening the door of grace to the Gentiles. Then Paul crowned the testimony by preaching that Jesus is "the Son of God." Thus we have the three things which God has established in Him, viz., lordship, headship, and sonship. All that God has brought to pass on earth to-day, and all that He is about to bring to pass in the age to come, all hangs upon this threefold glory of Christ. The things which exist at the present time are the kingdom, the body of Christ, and the house of God. The kingdom depends upon His being Lord, the body upon His being Head, and the house of God upon His being Son of God, He is Son over God's house. All this is maintained in testimony now until all is set up in power and glory another day.

When we remember that we are in a world where Christ is rejected, and where everything of God as set forth in Him has been refused, we see how immensely important the testimony is, and how it must be God's supreme interest here. As far as I see, there are only two things in which God has any special interest on earth at the present time, viz., His testimony, and His assembly. He is ever active in the maintenance of these two things, they are upheld by His power, they are in the care of the Holy Spirit who is here. Consequently, whoever is really devoted to the interest of God here, finds himself in the line of God's power, as it has been said, like a ship in the trade winds; while on the other hand, when a servant drops out of the line of God's interest, he

loses his former power, and is like a ship in the doldrums. If a man is faithful to the testimony of God according to the light he has received, God supports and blesses him; but if a man who has enjoyed further light drops down to a lower level of practice, he loses the support and blessing of God. That which is God's great interest here is the object of Satan's inveterate hostility. In a variety of ways, by open opposition, or by subtle craft, he is ever seeking to destroy or corrupt, and so to nullify, the testimony of God. He raises the winds and the waves that if possible he may swamp the vessel in which it is found (Mark iv. 35-41; Acts xxviii.). We do well to remember that there are always these two unseen but mighty forces at work in connection with the testimony of God. In the Acts, which is the history of the establishment of the present testimony, we see these two forces continually at work—the power of God and the power of Satan. But we also see the complete superiority of God over Satan, making all the machinations of the enemy to serve His own ends in the preservation and spreading abroad of His testimony, using the persecution of His servants to discipline them, in order to preserve the testimony in its purity, and to make them more efficient as witnesses (see 2 Cor. iv. 7-12).

Then again, it is by His word that God affects men, working in them that which is of Himself. We are begotten of God by the gospel, and as we appropriate the word of God we grow thereby, that is, increase in spiritual stature, in other words we grow up to Christ in all things as we receive the word of the Christ. Before Paul went to Corinth with the testimony of God, there was nothing for God there, the population was composed of unbelieving Jews and idolatrous Gentiles; but as the result of the preaching of the apostle, there came to be an assembly of God at Corinth composed of those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, and a new fellowship was formed composed of those who by the gospel had been

called to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus we see the immense importance of the testimony of God, and how it must be His great interest in this world.

But it is also of great interest to us as light for our path here and as a centre and bond of fellowship. This we see set forth figuratively in the tabernacle. It was called the "tabernacle of testimony" (Num. i. 50). Also "the tent of meeting" (Num. ii. 2). The first, because in it was set forth figuratively that which God purposed to establish and display in the age to come, in the administration of the fulness of the times, for the display of His glory, and the glory of Christ in the universe. Thus the tabernacle was a figure of the universe as it will exist in that day, the "all things" which God is building by Christ and which is put under Christ as Son over God's house. In the tabernacle there were three parts, the holiest, the holy place, and the court. The first represents the church, that part of "the all things" which God is building at the present time. The second represents the position which Israel will occupy in the millennium. The court represents the position of the saved nations. Then the universe will be God's house, but the church will be the shrine where Christ in His glory will dwell. Then it was called the "Tent of meeting," because it was the centre and meeting-place of the congregation. This throws light upon the passage, Matt. xix. 29, "My name" represents the present testimony, the name expresses what has been established and set forth in the Person of the Christ. He is not here in person on the earth to-day, but we have His name, it corresponds to the tent of meeting, it is our centre and bond, we gather to His name, and in so doing we can count upon His presence in a spiritual way. Three things marked the assembly at Philadelphia: they loved Christ, "Thou hast kept my word"; they were faithful to the testimony, they had not

denied His name ; and they were separate from the world, they kept the word of His patience. It has been truly said that Israel were not left to go through the wilderness as a confused rabble, but were maintained as an orderly company by having the tabernacle as a centre around which they all pitched their tents and with which they moved forward. Every tribe pitched its tents in relation to the tabernacle in the place assigned to each by God, and when they moved forward the cloud over the tabernacle was their guide. So with us, if the testimony is our chief interest, we shall be able to walk together in unity, and if we keep our eye upon it we shall not miss our way. The business of the Levites was to carry this tabernacle through the wilderness, they were continually occupied with it. So it should be with us to-day, it should be the chief business of our lives, and those who are devoted to the testimony of the Lord will be drawn together and will know the fellowship which is in the Spirit. Paul addressed Timothy as a Levite when he said, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." Our devotion to the Lord will be expressed at least in one way by devotion to His testimony. In 1 Cor. i. 9, the apostle speaks of our being "called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," here we get the full name, and this is the true bond of christian fellowship. In Acts ii. we read of those who received the word, continuing "in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here again the fellowship was based upon the teaching of the apostles. Again, in 1 Jno. i. we read, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." Saints are brought into apostolic fellowship by receiving apostolic teaching. Thus the testimony becomes a bond of fellowship. In Phil. i. 27, the apostle expresses the desire that the saints might be united in one spirit with one mind, "Striving together for the faith of the gospel."

The faith of the gospel was to be the uniting bond. And in a day of general confusion and declension, as contemplated in 2 Tim. ii., the same bond is that which unites those who are true to the Lord ; we are to " follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that *call on the Lord* out of a *pure heart*." The name of the Lord is still the only bond, only the fellowship is restricted on account of the state of the professing body, therefore the apostle adds, " out of a pure heart." In the last days of Israel's history we find that the name of Jehovah was a bond uniting together those who feared Him and thought upon His name (Mal. iii. 16). So it must be, all who love the Lord and are jealous for His glory must find themselves together in true fellowship, outside of all selfish considerations and worldly associations, not as those who seek their own things. This is fellowship in the Spirit. In his 3rd epistle the Apostle John, in writing to Gaius, says, " Greet the *friends* by name." He does not say " Greet the brethren " nor " Greet the church." The state of things in the church was very sad, but there were " the friends," those who were faithful to the Lord, as the Lord said, " Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." The apostle recognized such, and they knew one another, there was a special link between them, viz., the truth. These are the lines on which our friendships should be formed, not on the ground of natural or social links. If we love the Lord, we love those who are seeking to be true to Him.

Another thing we see in connection with the tabernacle of testimony is, that it served for guidance to the people in a trackless desert. If an Israelite lost sight of the tabernacle, he would lose his way and be left to drift, not knowing where he was going. How many saints to-day are thus drifting, having lost their way through not keeping their eye upon the testimony of God. The cloud of glory, symbol of the presence of God, rested upon the tabernacle, the tabernacle moved with the cloud. So now, the

Spirit of God is here identified with the testimony of God, see (Jno. xv. 26, 27 ; 1 Jno. v. 6, 8 ; Acts i. 8 ; ii. 3, 4, 17, 18 ; vii. 55, 56 ; 1 Cor. ii. 4). Therefore, if we are identified with God's testimony we shall find ourselves in the line of the Spirit's power, we shall realize His support and guidance, and shall be able to make headway ; but if we lose sight of the present testimony, we shall drop out of the line of the Spirit's power. This explains the fact, often seen, of men losing the power that once characterized their service, and being lost as regards the testimony of the Lord. Though they do not give up their christian profession nor forfeit the grace given them in Christ Jesus, they are no longer found standing in the conflict of the glad tidings.

In Eph. iii. 16, 17, the apostle prays that we may be strengthened with power by the Spirit in the inner man, that *the Christ may dwell through faith in our hearts*. To be effective witnesses, we must carry the testimony in our hearts. The expression "the Christ," signifies not only what He is personally, but what He is officially, that is all that God has established in Him as the anointed Man, the Man of God's purpose. I think therefore that we might say that the testimony is expressed in "the Christ." He is the Centre of that great system, comprised in the length and breadth and depth and height of God's universe. It is only as we abide in Him and in His love, and He abides in us, that we shall be effective witnesses. It is the privilege of saints to be Levites as well as priests. The Levites were set apart for a special service, their business was to carry the tabernacle of testimony and its vessels, they were to devote themselves wholly to the work assigned to them by God, it was the business of their lives. But they were not called upon to take up this service until they came to a certain age, not until they came to manhood. We may learn from this that saints are not qualified to take up the responsibilities and conflict of the testimony until they have

arrived at a certain stage of spiritual maturity. Many are disqualified on this account, viz., because they are children when they ought to be men, they are children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. Clearly such are unable to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; they are not sufficiently free from their own things to be devoted to God's things. Sisters may take part in Levitical service, as we see in Rom. xvi., where the apostle commends several sisters for their devoted service in connection with the work of the gospel, showing there are many ways in which sisters can actively identify themselves with the testimony of God. The Levite acted under the direction of the priest, the two orders of service were linked together. So they must be in us, it is only as we are in the enjoyment of our priestly privilege in access to God in the sanctuary that we shall be efficient in our Levitical service. In the sanctuary we are not only in the light of all that is revealed of God, but there we gain intelligence of His mind, and there we are transformed and formed in that which is of God, which is so essential for true service. We cannot be true witnesses unless we are ourselves formed by the truth. If we are to set forth God as revealed in Christ, we need to be built up in Christ, to be built up in our spiritual constitution. A man's testimony cannot be any better than himself. He may in teaching set forth that which is beyond himself,—that is, beyond what has been wrought in him by the Spirit of God; but such ministry will not be effective, because it will not be living water flowing from the inward parts. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, out of his belly (his inward parts) shall flow rivers of living water" (Jno. vii. 38). The perfect witness could say, *I am* "altogether that which I say to you." The Apostle Paul could say, "What ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and *seen in me*, these things do." He could say to Timothy, "Thou hast known my teaching,

manner of life," etc. And he expressed the desire for the saints at Philippi, that they might conduct themselves worthily of the glad tidings, and that they might shine as lights in the midst of men, holding forth the word of life. The testimony of God is the standard for our walk, we may commend Christ more effectually by manner of life than by verbal testimony.

In the beginning the church was formed by the testimony, and was the vessel of the testimony, it was set here in the light of the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, that it might be the vessel of light in this dark world. But as such it has failed to answer the mind of God, so that in the end it will be removed as God's candlestick. Consequently, in these last days the testimony has been identified more with faithful men, with men of God such as Paul, Timothy, etc. Even in the apostle's day he had to say, "All they in Asia have turned away from me." They had not apostatized, but they had turned away from the man who in a special way represented the testimony of the Lord at that moment. In view of his departure he exhorted Timothy himself to commit to faithful men the things which he had heard from the apostle. In Rev. ii. & iii., where the failure of the church as the light-bearer on earth is depicted, the Lord appeals to the overcomer, and such are found to the end. And to-day, although the church is still held responsible as the vessel of light here, yet the maintenance of the testimony is very much connected with faithful men, men of God.

Let us now consider the circumstances in which the testimony is found. It is here in a world which has rejected everything of God as presented to men in Christ, and which crucified the Son of God,—where Satan is still in power, and in a time which is spoken of as man's day, a day in which man's will is dominant in this world. Hence it is a suffering testimony, and in reproach, as it was when Christ the true witness

was here, who had to say, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." So it is to-day, those who are identified with the testimony of God must be prepared for reproach and suffering, and even death. Paul had to say to Timothy, "Suffer evil along with the glad tidings." And as to himself he could say, "For which cause also I suffer these things, but I am not ashamed." And again, "For this we labour and suffer reproach." "For this cause I endure all things." "If we have died together with him, we shall also live together; if we endure, we shall also reign." See also Luke xiv. 25, 33; Phil. i. 29, 30. Therefore, if we are identified with God's testimony, we shall find ourselves in conflict with all the powers of evil in this world, we must expect to encounter the winds and waves (Mark iv. 35, 41). The wind represents a mighty invisible power, that is the power of Satan, acting upon masses of men (the waves), stirring them up against the testimony of God (Acts xix. 28, 29). That is what Satan is ever seeking to do, and if he cannot destroy it, he will seek to corrupt it. The conflict is between God and Satan, and the battle is ever raging round this one point, the testimony of God. In every controversy and conflict we need to bear this in mind. This explains much that we have to encounter. God's care for His testimony accounts for the siftings which He permits to occur among His saints. Elements arise which are antagonistic to the testimony, and become more and more aggressive, so that to preserve His testimony among us God allows a sifting to take place, and thus removes the elements which are inimical to it. Such purging must take place or the testimony would be corrupted and lost. We may be sure that as long as the testimony of the Christ is here, Satan will not leave it alone, so that we must expect continual conflict; hence we need to stand having on the whole armour of God. Normally the whole church should be standing as the Lord's host in this conflict against

the wiles of the devil, against the spiritual powers of wickedness in heavenly places, standing for the testimony of the Lord (Eph. vi.). The apostle exhorted the Philippians that they should "stand firm in one spirit with one soul, labouring together in the same conflict with the faith of the glad tidings." Jude exhorted the saints to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." If we are not prepared to contend for the faith, we shall certainly lose it; only we have to remember that it is not with flesh and blood that we have to fight, nor with carnal weapons, it is against spiritual powers of wickedness, it is a spiritual conflict carried on with spiritual weapons, by spiritual men in the power of the Lord, and hence in dependence upon Him. Paul speaks of his ministry as a warfare, but he says, "We do not war according to the flesh, for the arms of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful according to God, to the overthrow of strongholds, overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God." At the end he could say, "I have fought a good fight." He exhorted Timothy to acquit himself as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

While in a normal condition of things all saints who are men (spiritually) should take part in this conflict, and stand together for the faith of the gospel; yet in days of general decline and weakness among the people of God, as we have seen, the testimony has always been identified with "faithful men" (2 Tim. ii. 2). The testimony is maintained, and the conflict is carried on in such for the benefit of the whole church. There are always overcomers, men who are valiant for the truth, who do not consider their own interests or even their own lives, but who are devoted to the Lord and to His testimony, who like Gideon's 300 men use the mercies God affords them, but whose heart is really in the Lord's battle, who in seeking to stand for the truth preserve bread for all the people of God. The greater the general

weakness and decline the greater the need for such men of God, men who will stand for God at all costs, men who are not fearful or afraid in the day of battle, who have no interest of their own to serve, who know that the Lord has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion.

Finally, we may consider the resource of the witness, especially in an evil day. The Lord Himself is the resource of the witness. The apostle said to Timothy, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." He could say, "I know whom I have believed." When all had forsaken him, and he had to stand alone before the Emperor Nero and the court at Rome, he had to say, "No man stood with me . . . but the Lord stood with me." And he was assured He would do so to the end. "The Lord shall deliver me from every wicked work, and shall preserve me for his heavenly kingdom." He reminds Timothy that the testimony is the Lord's, it is in His administration. He admonished him to "Remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David." For himself he looked to the Lord as the righteous Judge for His approval and reward which He would render to him and to all those who love His appearing. When the perfect witness was here He could say, "I have set Jehovah always before me, he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." (*See also* Ps. vii. 1; xi. 1; xviii. 1-3; xxvii. 1-3.) If we set the Lord before us and seek His interests, we shall always find Him at our right hand, we shall be conscious of His support and approval, and we can look to Him for our reward, and like the apostle (1 Cor. iv.) we shall be content to refer everything to His day. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."