

INTRODUCTION

We are evangelical Christians, and so we are familiar with the word testimony. We have heard a good many of them. But we are also reformational Christians, and this means that a number of us grew either weary or suspicious of the practice because of how it has been mishandled out in pop evangelicalism. But this is a profound error on our part. Rightly understood, the Christian faith is testimony.

THE TEXT:

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

Near the climax of the book of Revelation, the apostle sees the judgment of the harlot, the false bride (Rev. 19:3), and the great preparations for the wedding of the true bride, the Christian church (Rev. 19:7). A mighty angel confirmed everything that the multitude of joyful voices were saying. And John, overcome, fell down to worship the mighty angel, and was stopped by him. The mighty angel said that he was a fellow-bondslave (*sundoulos*), a fellow bond-slave with John’s brothers, who had the testimony (*marturia*) of Jesus. Worship God, he said, for the *marturia* of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. We get the word martyr from this word for witness or testimony, but sealing your testimony with your blood is simply an exclamation point on something that all of us have. Every Christian is a martyr; every Christian has something to say.

CLICHÉD TESTIMONIES:

One of the reasons we have drifted away from telling our testimony is that we have heard it done poorly. But slipshod work should never make us despise fine work. Counterfeit money should not make us reject real money. Clichés are a problem, but they are also a problem with sermons, books, songs, blog posts, Twitter feeds, and so forth. If we don’t like something done poorly, then we should not run in the other direction. We should labor to do it right. This is particularly the case when the activity in question is a biblical one—which the idea of witnessing or testifying most certainly is.

LURID TESTIMONIES:

One of the ways that people fight ho-hum testimonies is by means of making it really exciting—the way a lousy movie director tries to rescue a lame script by adding motorcycles and explosions. This is the testimony that makes the wild story the norm—as though you don’t really have a testimony unless you rode with the Hell’s Angels and beat up Mick Jagger’s bodyguard once. But for those of you growing up in the church . . . this is not what you should be shooting for. You do not have a boring testimony, but take care that you do not define boring from the wrong dictionary.

WHAT TESTIMONY IS:

The ark of the covenant was called the ark of the testimony numerous times (e.g. Ex. 26:34). The two tables of the Ten Commandments were called the “tables of testimony” (Ex. 31:18). The tabernacle was called the “tabernacle of testimony” (Num. 1:53). We testify to God’s testimony. God says “I am here,” and we say “Yes, He is.”

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1, 3).

There it is—testimony. But one of the characteristics of modernity is that Hume and Kant, in a frenzy of high conceit, helped to banish “testimony” as a reliable source of knowledge. We want a way of knowing that we think is indubitable. But we are finite, and so it has to be testimony or nothing. We are like the fellow who says the world is a flat disk, resting on the back of a turtle. “What’s the turtle standing on?” a friend asked. “Another turtle,” was the reply. The friend started to ask another follow up question, and was cut off. “Look. It is turtles all the way down.” Our only choice is true testimony or false.

TELLING THE STORY:

So what then is true testimony? In order for us to have the right kind of testimony, we have to know that it is God’s testimony. If He has no testimony concerning us, then we can have no testimony concerning Him. We are telling the story of what He has done, and when we tell the story of what He has done, He is continuing to do it. We tell our testimony faithfully when we are keeping His testimony (Ps. 119:88).

WHERE GOD IS ALL IN:

We do not serve a “pie dough” God, where the further it spreads, the thinner it gets. The longer history goes, it is not like playing the telephone game over three thousand years instead of two thousand, with increasing garble as we go. Going to Heaven will not be like going to a conference where ten thousand people are hoping to shake hands for two seconds with the main celebrity. If you have Jesus, you do not have a fraction of Him. If God is with you, if Christ is in you, if the Spirit is upon you, you are not on the outskirts of His purposes. When you pray, it is not to a distracted God, who has billions of people chattering at Him. You—little old you—have His undivided attention. This means that He and you together are in this thing that is happening to you, and you have the privilege of talking about it.

TO OBLIGATE BELIEF:

When you tell others what God has done, and it is what He has done according to Scripture, this testimony resonates with the way God made the world. A true testimony obligates belief in the one hearing it. This is not affected by whether he does or does not believe. The obligation is there, and it is felt, regardless of whether the faith is there.

“Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (Acts 14:3–4).

CRAFT THE STORY:

So write your story. Tell people about Jesus. Put it on Facebook. Facebook could use a little more of the spirit of prophecy.