

# THE TESTIMONY

By

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Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus warned the disciples that they would be hated by the world, persecuted, hounded from place to place, and even slain by their own kinsman who would kill them thinking they were doing it for God (John 15:18; 16:2).

But He would send the “comforter.” “But when the Comforter is come...even the spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, he shall bear witness of me” (John 15:26).

Great comfort! To be persecuted and tortured and slain! What comfort the presence of God’s spirit if one still must go through the suffering and shame of public censure and the horror of physical abuse and death?

In this generation of the self-centered, especially in the religious community that emphasizes the satisfaction of the senses as a sign of spiritual grace, such promises hold little comfort. One filled with the spirit is expected to exemplify success, health, a radiant personality, personal appeal, popularity and a life free from tears and failure. The struggling Christian, wrestling against personal failures, public opposition, physical infirmities and financial difficulties often may ask himself if he really has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised upon his baptism (Acts 2:38).

But the apostles had no such problem. Often enough Jesus had warned them. If they were to be His disciples they just deny themselves, and bear the cross for themselves. They were to be acquainted with the hatred of unbelievers, even those of their own families. “If the world hate you,” Jesus said, “you know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). They must renounce all, and be willing and ready to lay down their lives. They had no illusions about receiving from the Holy Spirit the power to become famous, wealthy, and successful in a worldly sense.

The Holy Spirit is the “spirit of truth.” His testimony is of the truth concerning Jesus. “He shall bear witness of me.” On Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit was given and the apostles became bearers of the truth. Peter, under the influence of the Spirit, gave testimony of the fact that Jesus is the One who fulfilled the scriptures with regard to the Savior and King of Israel; that he died as it had been written, that He rose from the dead, is now seated on David’s throne, and is not Lord (Acts 2:22–36). The word “Lord” in English is translated from the word the Jews used to refer to God in His role as ruler over men. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the ruler of His world. This is the truth the Holy Spirit came to establish, that Jesus is Lord. In the words of T. Robert Ingram, “Apart from the truth that flows from this truth there is no truth. The truth that Jesus is Lord is not satisfied by the notion that He is merely ‘my Lord’ and not necessarily yours. It is not met by the notion that He is not yet Lord, but someday will be, especially if I and others can get enough votes. It is not that He ought to be Lord. And above all, it is not that He is really Lord, but is sitting back letting some imagined god of evil make a playground of God’s world...They who do not believe that Jesus is Lord are blind to the truth. But they too are living dead, Christ’s Creatures, and He must organize them under what we call the world—unbelief contained

and controlled by law and the power of death. The world, in unbelief, claims it knows no Lord but Caesar, he who governs by force of arms.”

Therefore this became the foundation of apostolic preaching. “We preach...Jesus Christ as Lord,” wrote Paul (II Cor. 4:5). Moreover it was the test of whether or not one had the Holy Spirit.” “No man can say that Jesus is Lord but in the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). But to say it in truth one must accept the natural conclusions.

For one thing, all the claims of Christ are absolutely true. “All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18). This leaves no room for a plurality of faiths. In recent years there have been numerous confrontations between professing Christians and Jews, almost always with the conclusion being drawn that Christians must concede some authenticity of Judaism as a legitimate “faith” in God. Jesus plainly stated, “No one comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). If there is some other way, then Jesus is not Lord after all. This was the issue that landed Paul and other apostles in jail time after time, when they preached to the Jews that Jesus was Lord and that they must convert to Him. Modern Christians want to accept Him as Lord, with exceptions! It may be the only way to stay out of trouble with the Jews and the press they control, but it is not the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

It applies to His claim as the only one who can give life, that at His coming all the dead shall rise, some to life and some to judgment and destruction (John 5:28–29). This claim, which He made more than once, takes precedence over all other concepts, such as those derived from the symbolic expressions in Revelation.

It applies to His claim to goodness. “I am the good Shepherd” He said (John 10:11). His commands are good. His leading is good. His judgment is good. If one is in Him, “All things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). It is almost incredible, especially when “things” are going so badly. How could any possible good come of them? But the witness of the Holy Spirit is that He is Lord, and all power belongs to Him. If He says things will work together for good to His elect, then we who believe simply rest in this fact. Think how this contrasts with the pessimism of the world, and how the world must view the Christian. Do we come across as those who have a Lord who is good? Who is working all things out for good? And how must the world see the prophets of doom who are peddling survival wares to Christians on the basis that the Lord is going to give them some bad times before long and that they must look out for themselves and guard against what the Lord is doing?

Secondly, the testimony that Jesus is Lord must also be accompanied by obedience. The only other direction to go from His Lordship is rebellion. “We will not have this man rule over us” (Luke 19:4). The result of that decision is destruction (Vs. 27). When Peter first proclaimed that God had made Jesus Lord, the immediate response from the multitude of devout believers was, “Brethren, what shall we do?” The question was addressed to the apostles, who minced no words in giving the answer. “And Peter said unto them, ‘Repent and be immersed (baptized); everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38). Had those believers on that day argued the point and questioned the need of being immersed (baptized) for the remissions of sins as is generally done today, it would have been a plain case of rebellion against the Lord whom Peter had just set forth. The church began with the acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord and that He was to be obeyed. In spite of whatever logistic problems might have arisen in immersing 3,000 in

one day, there was not the slightest hesitation in doing so. It was this spirit of obedience to the Lord that marked the first triumphant decades of the church under the leading of the apostles.

To confess that Jesus is Lord may bring opposition and difficulties in the midst of a rebellious world, but it also brings a solution to the important questions. It means that ethical questions are all answered by Him who said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” No more does one labor over the issue, “What is the Lord’s will for my life?” Jesus has given us His will. It is in the New Testament. There are plenty of choices left up to our own preference, but everyone of us knows that we cannot be doing the will of God while living contrary to His commands and example.

Questions of ethics must be answered, not by cultural mores, but by the One who is Lord! Homosexuality, abortion, and pre-marital sex are all treated pragmatically by many church members. The general social climate, economics and world pressure takes precedence over the commands of Christ. The confession may say that Jesus is Lord, but the practice says that He doesn’t have to be obeyed. This is both resistance of the Holy Spirit and denial of Jesus.

Not only in the questions of fleshly morals must we submit to the commands of the Lord, but also in economics, business, and family. Treasures are not to be laid up in treasury notes and stocks, but in the Kingdom, in teaching, preaching, publishing the message, and in sharing with those in need. Whatever business a Christian engages in must be of a nature that he can pursue it “as unto the Lord.” This raises the question of how it can please the Lord for one to build arms that are shipped to a foreign nation to be used to maim, burn, and kill the innocent. How does this answer the command to do unto others as you would have them do unto you?

Finally, the fact that Jesus is Lord is the basis of evangelism. “All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go ye therefore and make disciple of all nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:18–20 — There’s that troublesome business of baptism again, and here also it is connected with making disciples). Being universal Lord, Jesus demands obedience in all nations. No sooner does one confess Him as Lord that he immediately comes under the command to press this fact upon those who know Him not, among ALL nations.

This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is Lord. Wherever there is a Christian filled with the Holy Spirit, this is to be the testimony, both by word and deed, that Jesus is Lord of His creation, and all must answer to Him!

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