

For the Life of the World

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We Are His Witnesses.

The Saints of Salem Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, North Carolina

Pastor: Rev. Ray R. Ohlendorf

CONTENTS

Volume Fifteen, Number One

FEATURES

4 “You are Witnesses” Confessing Christ Crucified with the Early Christians

By Dr. James G. Bushur

For the early Christians, witnessing is not an activity performed from time to time; it is an identity rooted in the disciple’s relation to Christ. From this perspective, the title “witness” signifies the greatest intimacy. A witness is not merely a spectator, but a participant—a member of Christ’s body and a son within the family. This intimacy adds a depth of meaning to the early Christian understanding of witness.

8 Witness in the Book of Revelation: Living as Faithful and True Martyrs

By Dr. Charles A. Gieschen

Against all forms of idolatry that surround and tempt us, the Book of Revelation sets before us the most powerful witness that we can give to the world: gathering together on earth with the saints of heaven to worship the one true God who alone is worthy to be worshiped because with His blood He “has purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people and nation” (5:9).

10 Witness

By Prof. Roland F. Ziegler

Therefore, for us today, to be a witness means: to speak the truth about God in the ongoing debate about who God is and what His will is. The task is not to convince a jury, for there is none, but that through this witness to the truth God Himself convinces man of the truth. To be a faithful witness means that in our testimony we say nothing beyond Scripture and let Scripture be the judge in all discussions.

Also in this issue:

Library Expansion Update	p. 7
What Does This Mean?	p. 13
In the Field	p. 14
Technology Is Our Friend	p. 17
Dr. Wenthe Announces Retirement	p. 19
Christ Academy—High School 2011	p. 22
Alumni News	p. 25
Profiles in Giving	p. 29
In the Word	p. 30



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Witness

By Prof. Roland F. Ziegler

To be a faithful witness means that in our testimony we say nothing beyond Scripture and let Scripture be the judge in all discussions. To be a good witness we have to grow in our understanding of God's revelation in Christ and therefore we have to read Scripture.

When we hear the word witness, it is often in a legal context. A person appears in a court to witness or testify. One speaks from one's own experience what one has seen or heard. Witnesses are required in the search for the truth. What has really happened? Who speaks the truth? Witnesses give evidence so that the jury may see the truth in a contested situation: Which party is right? Which position is supported by factual evidence?

The primary witnesses in Christianity are the apostles who give evidence concerning Christ. They report what they have heard and seen (1 John 1:2). Testifying about Christ, they not only describe the external events, but also show their significance as they are clearly revealed in the light of the resurrection. Therefore the witness to the resurrection is so important (Acts 2:32). Thus the apostles are witnesses of Christ in a singular way. All later generations depend upon their witness, just as we depend upon the accounts of contemporaries for other events in history.

There is, though, a difference. Witnesses in a trial can give evidence that is not factual, even when they are well intentioned. Their memory can play tricks on them so that two different events merge into one, there can be faulty identifications, they can mistake what they have been told with what they heard. The apostolic witnesses are preserved from such defects in the writing of the New Testament because these books are not simply memories written down, or, in the case of Luke's and Mark's


Gospels third party accounts of memories of eyewitnesses, but they are authored by the Holy Spirit through human writers, and thus are free from the deficiencies of human recollections. They are ultimately God's witness to Christ through human witnesses.

Nobody after the apostolic age is such a witness, because the Holy Spirit has not acted upon anyone in such a way since that time. Thus, all other utterances and books written by Christians are derived from the inspired writings and ultimately aim to be nothing but a faithful exposition of what the Scriptures say, a paraphrase of Scripture in the situation of later times and thus a testimony to the truths that are the Scriptures. If they are faithful to the Scriptures, or if they are a false witness, has to be evaluated by the Scriptures as the pure fountain of Israel. Thus, the Scriptures are the judge of all witness to God and Christ in the church.

When Christians today are called witnesses, then they are witnesses who testify to the truth of God's Word, the truth of His revelation in Christ. They cannot serve as eyewitnesses but they can state the truth of the matter in the lawsuit that is going on. For God is accused in this world that He is unfair or that He does not care. God is maligned: His existence is denied, false doctrines and idolatrous practices are associated with Him. Who God is and what He wants is a matter of contention in this world (cf. Isaiah 43:10). All Christians have a part in this struggle; it is their duty to say the truth so that error dissipates in the mind of those who go astray, who sit in the darkness of heresy or unbelief or are just confused. Unlike an earthly trial, this is not resolved in a few weeks. Rather, it will come to an end when Christ returns and vindicates the Christians' witness before all eyes. He will be the judge and man the accused, and the ways and words of God will be justified before all men.

There are two other ways in which we can talk about Christians as witnesses. One, when they not only say the truth but also show reasons for the hope which is in them (1 Peter 3:15). This is the task of apologetics which counters the claims that the Christians' witness is unreliable and untrustworthy. Their witness can be attacked because it is judged by its detractors as a testimony that contradicts the facts as established by modern science and historiography, because it is contended that the Scriptures themselves are a mishmash of little truth and a lot of imagination. Christians who engage in apologetics argue the case as to why the Christians' witness based on Scripture, and thus Scripture itself, should not be dismissed but admitted as evidence and why it can be regarded as *good evidence*.

Secondly, Christians are witnesses concerning God's actions in their lives. Here the Christians have first-hand knowledge. They witness how God has answered prayers, how He has led them to repentance, converted them, comforted them in hard times. But because we are not apostles, we can be deceived even in this witness. If someone would say: "I divorced my spouse because I finally found my true love and I know that God approves of it, because I feel His peace in my heart," he is obviously giving false witness about God, since God has clearly stated what He thinks about marital fidelity in the Scriptures and because God cannot contradict Himself. Therefore, our witness about God's actions in our life has to be evaluated by Scripture too, otherwise we fall into the error of enthusiasm.

Therefore, for us today to be a witness means to speak the truth about God in the ongoing debate about who God is and what His will is. The task is not to convince a jury, for there is none, but that through this witness to the truth God Himself convinces man of the truth. To be a faithful witness means that in our testimony we say nothing beyond Scripture and let Scripture be the judge in all discussions. To be a good witness we have to grow in our understanding of God's revelation in Christ and, therefore, we have to read Scripture. To be a good witness we also have to be good listeners so that we understand what the charges are that are brought against God and so that we give a testimony pertinent to the issue. 

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