

WCCC 1987

Brother Stephen Kaung

The Witness and The Testimony (1)

I Corinthians 2:1 – 5 And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much troubling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power.

Pay special attention to verse 1 in Chinese. Here it is 'to proclaim to you the mystery of God'. Whereas in English it is 'to announce to you the testimony of God'.

This time we would like to share on the topic of the testimony and the witness. We know testimony has a very important position in the bible. But today what we want to share is not about a person giving a testimony in the court. This in the world is also an important matter. We are also not fellowshipping on we, the believers, giving testimony to the world. Or that we are testifying to them the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ and how God has saved us. Although of course this is the responsibility of every one of us who are Christians. We are also not sharing on the testimonies among Christians; like when we gather together to tell of God's grace to us. Of course, this is also what we should do. But the testimony we are going to talk about this time is not all these. The testimony we are going to share is the testimony of God. And that is also the testimony of Jesus Christ. And it is also the testimony of the church. This is an important central point in the bible. So we would like to look into this matter together before God. The testimony of God is also the testimony that we should have. We will also share on the matter of the witness. The witness is as important as the testimony.

Before we start about this topic, I would like to clarify the terminology. The word 'testimony' and the word 'witness' in Hebrews or Greek are almost used interchangeably. When it is translated into English, some versions translate it into witness and some versions translate it into testimony. But in the original language it is always the same word. In Chinese translation, it is usually translated into the word witness. Sometimes it is used as 'giving witness'. Sometimes it is used as 'the witness'. So you can see that these two words are almost the same and it is connected and cannot be separated. If you look up the word in the English dictionary, testimony means you are there to proclaim and

to prove a matter or a truth. And this is the proof that you proclaim. And in the modern dictionary, it also said it means to declare a religious experience. What is a witness? The English dictionary said the witness is the one who sees or hears and then relates what he has seen or heard. But sometimes this word can also be used as a proof. We see that even in English the difference between these two words are not that clear too. In order to make it easier to understand, let us assume that the two words are used this way: testimony is the proof that the witness presents and witness is the person who gives the testimony. So the testimony is the content of the testimony and the witness is the person who gives the testimony. Let us separate the matter and the person for now. Let us remember that even though these two words are used separately for the sake of sharing yet in fact these two words cannot be separated. Testimony and the witness are inseparable. And this morning before the Lord, we will share together on the testimony. We will share on the testimony of God.

The testimony of God comes from God. The testimony is originated from God. God reveals Himself. And the Holy Spirit reveals what God has revealed about Himself in our spirit so that through the Holy Spirit we can know our God and we can testify for Him on earth. We remember Paul said in Romans 11: 36 *'For of Him, and through Him, and for Him are all things: to Him be the glory forever.'* So when we talk about the testimony of God we see that this testimony comes from God. It is by Him and the end it returns back to Him. God reveals Himself to us so that we can receive this revelation in our spirit. Then we stand up and give a testimony for Him. Let us remember testimony does not come from man. Testimony comes from God. If God does not testify for Himself, then today on this earth no one will know Him. But when He testifies about Himself, then we start to know our God. Does God need testimony? We know that we need God to testify for us. God does not need man to testify anything for Him. Why does God reveal His testimony to us? It is not because He has any need for it. Rather it is for our benefit. If God does not reveal His testimony to us, we will never know our God. You remember once when Paul went to Athens, he saw that the people there worshipped a lot of ghosts and spirits. They have many altars and idols. Paul saw that there is an altar for an unknown god. It is for a god that they did not know. Brothers and sisters, if you do not know God, how can you worship Him or serve Him? God revealed His own testimony, so we can know Him. Not only can we know Him, we can also serve Him and we can stand up and testify for Him. I hope brothers and sisters will remember this at the beginning of our sharing. The testimony of God is for our own benefit.

There are two important factors in a testimony. It does not count as a testimony if these two factors are not present. First the testimony must have the facts. The testimony must be according to the facts. Without facts, then it is a false testimony. Second, not only does a testimony need facts, but it also needs to have a personal seeing, hearing and experiencing. Maybe there is a fact. But if you have not seen this fact, or do not have the hearing of this fact by your own ear, and if you have not personally experienced this fact, your testimony will be

a false one. Although what you said is a fact, but if you have not personally experienced it, then it is second hand and it is still a false testimony before God. That is why we said a testimony has to have these two factors. It does not count as a testimony if there is missing even one of the two factors. We know in the bible there is a relationship between a true testimony and a false testimony. The bible pays great attention to this matter of testimony. For example, in Deuteronomy 19, it tells us that there has to be two to three witnesses. Then the matter can be established. The Lord also said in the Gospel of John 8, that by the words of two or three, the testimony will be established. So we know that a testimony is decisive. It can decide a matter. This is extremely important. A false testimony is also a serious matter. Deuteronomy 19 said if anyone who stands up to give a false testimony to harm his brother, the harm that he caused his brother will be returned on himself. This shows that one cannot give a false testimony.

This matter of testimony in the entire Old Testament occurs most frequently in the Pentateuch and in the Psalms. In the Pentateuch, the Book of Exodus is where the word 'testimony' most frequently used. In Psalms, the word 'testimony' used most frequently is in Psalm 119. In Exodus, the word testimony was used ten times.

In the Chinese version you cannot find the word 'testimony'. It is because in the Chinese translation, the word 'testimony' is translated as 'law' in the Book of Exodus. It is not a translation but an interpretation. When you see this word 'law' in connection to the ark, the tabernacle and the stone tablet in the original language it is testimony. I just mention the verses to help you find the word. Exodus 16:34, 25:16, 21, 27:21, 30:6, 36, 31:18, 32:15, 34: 29, 38:21. In these verses you can see that in the Chinese version the word 'law' is used. The ark of testimony, the tabernacle is the tabernacle of testimony, the tablets of the ten commandments are the tablets of law. In the original language all these are called testimony. Why is it in the Chinese version in Exodus the word testimony is translated as law? It is because in the Old Testament the testimony of God is the law of God. When God saved the Israelites out of Egypt, He led them to the foot of Mount Sinai. And then He gave His law, the ten commandments to the Israelites. And what are these ten commandments? These ten commandments – the laws are the revelation of God Himself. God used the ten commandments to reveal His own character. If God today did not speak, man would not know what kind of God He is, or what kind of character He has. But when God speaks, when He gave this law to the Israelites, then the Israelites will know the God they worship is what kind of God He is or what kind of character He has. And through this they can know God. So we can say through these ten commandments God reveals what kind of a God He is to the Israelites.

For example, the first commandment says besides Him there cannot be any other God. God is a unique God. He is the most honorable God. Besides Him there is no other God. Then we know that God is such a God. We know that

our God is a holy God. Our God is spirit because the second commandment said you shall not build an image of God. Not only is He a spirit, but today when we worship our God, we worship Him in truth and in spirit. He is the only God worthy of our worship and our service. Apart from Him, we should not have any other worship or any other service because our God is a jealous God. Why is He a jealous God? It is because He is a unique God. You cannot put anything on equal footing with Him. If you make anything equal to God, then that thing is your idol. That is something that God detests. Our God is a holy God. Holy means He is not common. You cannot put any other thing as His equal. Remember when our Lord brought the three apostles to the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah also appeared. Peter said, it is so good here. Let us build three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Before he even finished speaking, a cloud covered him and God's glory covered them. Moses and Elijah were not there anymore. And they heard a voice said this is my beloved Son whom I am pleased. You have to listen to Him. When they opened their eyes, they saw only Jesus there. Why was it so? It was because God is holy. You cannot put any person or thing in the same position as God. This is a matter that God detests. If any man wants to do so he will be punished because God is a righteous God. But thank God He is also a loving God. When He punishes, He only does so to the third and fourth generation. But His lovingkindness lasts into eternity. The third commandment says that our God is a faithful God.

You see that the four commandments on the first tablet involve God revealing to us about His own character. He tells of His own testimony in them. He is an only God. He is a Spirit. Only He is worthy of worship and service. We cannot have idols. He is a jealous God. He is a holy God, a righteous God, loving God, faithful God. He is a God full of grace. This is God's testimony. He testifies to Himself so that we can know Him.

You know, at one time Moses prayed before God and said, God, please reveal your glory to me. And God said to Moses, no one sees My face can live. But I can let you see My back. In Exodus 34, it said that God put Moses in the cleft of the rock. When God's glory passed by, Moses heard the proclamation of God. God was there proclaiming Himself. Exodus 34: 6 – 7 *'And Jehovah passed by before his face, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy into thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.'* From those verses we see the proclamation of God. And this completely corresponds to the first four commandments. It is because God testifies for Himself what kind of a God He is. When Moses heard it, he prostrated on the ground. Dear brothers and sisters, if God proclaimed Himself, if He relates His own testimony, if we truly hear and see it, then we can only prostrate ourselves on the ground to worship Him and acknowledge that only He is God. Then we see that there are

six other commandments on the other tablet. In these six commandments, God tells us about the correct relationship among men. Why does God have to tell us about the relationship among men? It is because man is created in the image of God. God's will is that man can represent Him and show what kind of a God He is. He wants us, who are created by Him, to be like Him. Otherwise we will fall short of the glory of God. So, we see in the latter six commandments, He wants His character to be our character and that we can be His testimony.

We can see that the testimony is the law. Our dear brother Watchmen Nee once said, the testimony of God is the law of God. In God it is the testimony. It is the law in the hands of man. God testifies Himself but when the testimony comes to man, in the hands of man, the testimony became law. What is the law? On the one hand, law declares the heart desire of God. On the other hand, the law is the requirement of God. We can say law is the standard of God. God reveals Himself to be the standard. We are to live according to that standard. God gave the law to the Israelites. This is a great thing because among all the men on earth, and among all the nations, God did not proclaim His law to them. He only gave Himself, that is the law to the Israelites. He separated the Israelites out from all the nations. So they are a different nation. For example, in Deuteronomy 4: 10, Moses reminded the Israelites, *'the day that thou stood before Jehovah thy God in Horeb, when Jehovah said to me, gather me the people together, that I may cause them to hear my words, that they may learn them, and fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and teach them to their children'*. Let us turn back to verses 5 – 8 *'See, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, even as Jehovah my God commanded me, that you may do so in the land into which you enter to possess it. And you shall keep and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding before the eyes of the peoples that shall hear all these statutes, and say, verily this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God near to them as Jehovah our God is in everything we call upon him for? And what great nation is there that has righteous statutes and ordinances, as all these laws which I set before you this day?'* We see that when God gave these laws to the Israelites, He separated them out from all the nations. That was a great glory. At the same time, we see that it was a great responsibility. The Israelites then had to be a good testimony for God in this world because God had entrusted His testimony into the hands of the Israelites.

In Psalms 119 the word testimony is used the most. Most of the time the word appears as testimonies. Only once did it appear as 'testimony'. No matter it appears as singular or plural, the word was used twenty-three times. But there is difficulty in the Chinese version of this Psalms. It did not use the word 'testimony' at all. It uses the Chinese characters that mean law and measure. And these two characters in the Chinese original language mean testimony. Why does the Chinese version use law and measure? Psalm 119 uses different ways to explain the words of God. Sometimes it said it is the law, sometimes it talked about precepts, sometimes it said it is statutes. It seems that testimony is equal

to all those. But we know in fact, testimony is the spiritual reality behind all the laws, precepts and statues. Psalms 119 shows us the attitude of a person who loves God, and his attitude towards the testimony of God. Exodus let us see the testimony of God. Psalms 119 expresses the attitude of one who loves God. He uses various terms to express his feelings for the testimony of God. I contemplate your words. I think of your words. My heart inclines to your words. My steps are walking towards your testimony. Your testimony is my heart's delight. Your testimony is my inheritance. I shall observe and I shall walk in your words. Your testimony is what I know. Your testimony is what I love. So you see the attitude of one who loves the testimony of God. Dear brothers and sisters, today what is our attitude towards the testimony of God?

When we look back at the Israelites, we see that God gave the commandments to the Israelites. We can also say God entrusted His own testimony to the Israelites. The Israelites took up a great responsibility on earth. They had received abundant grace because God spoke directly to them. But then their responsibility was equally great too. On this earth, they had to be vessels of the testimony of God. And the relationship of God with them was according to these commandments. If they observed the law of God, they would be blessed. If they did not observe the law of God, they would be cursed. So you can see that this is a very important matter. Those who love God expressed their feelings for the testimony of God in the Psalms. That was such a blessed situation.

When we look at the history of the Israelites, we see that they did not observe the law of God. I believe there is one matter that brothers and sisters notice when they are reading the bible. When God saved the Israelites out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and set out to Mount Zion. You remember how they murmured in that part of the journey. They murmured that they did not have good things to eat and did not have water to drink. Again and again they sinned against God. But one interesting thing was that God had never punished them. It seemed that God allowed them to murmur. God provided what they needed. And God did not punish them. But after the Israelites arrived at Mount Zion, and God had given the law and entrusted His own testimony to them, you noticed punishment would come on them every time they sinned. We see that in Book of Numbers, when they murmured again and talked about what they ate and drank, it was true that God was still gracious to them, but they were punished. Why was it so? God had not changed but why was it that how God treated them seemed to be different then? It was because before God gave them the law and entrusted to them His testimony, God had not dealt with them according to His testimony and law. But after God had already given them the law, the relationship between God and the Israelites began to base on the law. Although our God was still full of grace and mercy, yet whoever sinned against the law would be punished.

Here you see that one cannot sin against the testimony of God. Even in the Old Testament time, when man sinned against God's testimony, God would

declare for Himself. Not only were the Israelites punished for murmuring, we see that because that generation sinned against the testimony of God, they could not enter into Canaan. Even Moses could not enter into Canaan because he once sinned against the testimony of God. You see the Israelites provoked Moses to a point that his spirit was anxious. He did not honor God in front of the Israelites. God said you bring this staff; you command and spoke to this rock and water will come out. But Moses' heart was agitated. He was there reproaching the Israelites, saying to them, you the rebellious people, I give you water to drink. And he struck the rock with his staff twice. We know that this staff was not Moses' staff. This staff was Aaron's staff that was before the ark of testimony. And there were almond flowers and fruits. So when he struck the rock, he destroyed the staff. He did not honor God. He sinned against the testimony of God. He could not enter into Canaan.

So we see here that the testimony of God is a serious matter. In the history of Israel, we see the testimony of God. God did not entrust His testimony to any other nations on earth. Is it that God did not have a testimony from the beginning of the world? It is not so. We know since the creation of heaven and earth, God's testimony is already clear in the creation. For example, in Psalm 19: 1, the psalmist said, *'the heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse shows the work of His hands. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no speech and there are no words, yet their voice is heard'*. In other words, God through His creation of the heaven and earth, He declares His glory. And God is there testifying Himself. Romans 1 tells us what is known of God is already manifested in the hearts of man. For from the creation, the divinity and eternal power of God are clear. Through the heaven and the earth that He created we already know, so as to render us inexcusable. God also puts His testimony into the creation of heaven and earth. Man should worship this God. He is mighty. His divinity is His character. Even though not a lot is revealed, yet God's revelation is there. But man was foolish. Men refuse to believe in God. They do not accept the testimony that God has put into the creation. Men worship idols and left God.

Finally, God appeared to Abraham. At that time all men on earth worshipped idols. They denied God's testimony. At that time there was a man called Abraham. The bible said the God of glory appeared to him. We do not know how God appeared to him. Maybe Abraham was looking at the heavens one night and God appeared to him. Just like what was said in Psalm 8, *'when I see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou have established; what is man that thou are mindful of him'*. Maybe at that time, Abraham received the revelation from God. He believed in this unique God. And for this reason, God gave the law to his descendants, the Israelites.

But after the Israelites received the testimony of God, when we look at the history of the Israelites, we see that they did not observe the law. They violated the testimony of God. Although God raised many prophets to warn them, to tell

them to repent and return to the testimony of God, to turn back to the law of God, to turn back to the lovingkindness and righteousness, yet the Israelites continuously refused to listen. We know that God not only pay attention to the words of the law, but to the essence of the law. Even if the Israelites kept the words of the law, but if they violated the essence of the law, then they violated the testimony of God. Sometimes outwardly, the Israelites were observing the law. They sacrificed, they also observed the festivals, they also observed the sabbath, but in their heart, they were far away from God. Thus, God raised the prophet Isaiah to reprimand them. God said I am tired of the sacrifices. Even the last prophet Malachi said the same thing. God said how I wish you will close the doors of the temple. Do not offer the sacrifices. You did all these outward things, yet your heart is far away from me.

In the Old Testament time, God gave the law to the Israelites. But what God pays attention to is the testimony behind the law. If the testimony is lost, God is not satisfied. The Israelites were then taken into captivity to Babylon. And the nation of Israel was destroyed. Dear brothers and sisters, we know the testimony of God is a very grave matter. On one hand it is an immense glory. On the other hand, it is a great responsibility. It seems that we can take other things lightly. And sometimes God allows us to do that. But when we touch the testimony of God, you know there will be serious consequence. The Israelites were taken to Babylon as captives. And the nation was destroyed. Today if you can observe the testimony of God, God's blessing will come. Today if you do not observe the testimony of God, God shall make it clear for Himself. We can thus see the testimony of God is a very serious thing. I think we will stop the sharing here. If God willing, then tomorrow we will talk about the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, we truly thank and praise You because You are willing to reveal Yourself to man. You tell of Yourself to man what kind of a God You are. Our God, You gave Your testimony to man, so men can testify for You. So dear God, give us a deeper impression of You, so that we know we cannot take it lightly before You. Our Lord, let us see that You are so gracious to us, giving us Your testimony. You want us to be faithful to You on earth. Our Lord, enlighten us and speak to each of us. Lord, let us see whether we have sinned against Your testimony. Lord, please forgive us. Call us to live a God-fearing life on earth – trembling and observing Your will. Our Lord, what are we? Your testimony is so important. We place these words into Your hand and we ask the Holy Spirit to work in us. Please listen to our prayer. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.