

THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH.

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“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.”—Rev. xii. 11.

* * We are earnestly asked by anxious inquirers, both from without and within, *What is the efficacy or power of protest?* To this question we shall endeavor to give an intelligent answer.

In my text we have the sequel of the struggle between Michael and the Dragon, between Christ and the devil, between the Church and the powers of darkness; and the declaration is that the Church gained the victory, and drove out her enemies, and the means by which this victory was gained is expressed in my text: “By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” At first sight this seems to be a two-fold instrumentality, but a careful study of the text will show it to be single. Throughout the whole contest Michael and his angels represent the leader and his army; the woman and her man-child represent the same host under a different figure. Christ identifies himself with His Church in the struggle. As in Daniel vii. 27, He identifies Himself with His people in reigning, so here the testimony of the church is Christ’s testimony—“Ye are my witnesses;” and the blood of the Lamb is the seal of that testimony; and their blood is ready to be added to His in confirmation of the same testimony, for it is added that “they loved not their lives unto the death.” It is to the kingdom of our God and His Christ that this testimony is borne, as the tenth verse clearly shows; and the answer of Christ to Pilate, when asked if He was a king, is—“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” So that the meaning of the text is that the victory by which the dominion of this world will be wrested from Satan, and established in the hand of Christ, will be accomplished by the blood-sealed testimony of the Church and her Head. I propose to consider:

I. The meaning of some terms used in the text.

1. *The term Testimony* expresses a witnessing for truth, especially when that truth is denied, or the contrary error is advocated. But especially “the testimony of Jesus” is the unfurling a banner in behalf of His royal

prerogatives and regal claims. It was as king—as “Messiah the prince,” that He was predicted; as a king He was expected: “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” was the inquiry of the wise men from the East. As a king He was announced to Mary by the angel, and to the shepherds by the heavenly choir. As a king He was tried by Pilate. He was crucified with a crown of thorns upon His brow, and the superscription over His cross was “King of the Jews.” It was as a king the Jews rejected Him—“We have no king but Caesar:” and it is His right to reign that is called in question to-day. It was to this the Scottish martyrs bore testimony. On their blue banner was inscribed, “For Christ’s Crown and Covenant,” and it is this banner that so many of the professed followers of Christ are trailing in the dust to-day, and it is this banner which a little band of covenanted witnesses would unfurl to the breeze. It is the name written on His vesture and thigh, “King of kings and Lord of lords,” that we ask this nation to read. It is His claim to be “Governor of the nations,” that we ask this nation to acknowledge.

Testimony, to be effective, must be clear and pointed. It must contain a thorough exposure of the opposite error or falsehood, and a full vindication of the truth and the right, and the more candid, calm, and clear, the more effective.

2. *Protest.* This is a solemn act of a minority against a statement made, or a position assumed, by the majority, with which they are connected or identified. In any association of men, organized for whatever purpose, the act of the association involves the responsibility of all its members, even although they may not have favored the act, unless in some way they signify their disapprobation of it. In such case, it is common for a minority to record their dissent, and thereby place on record their opposition to the act of the majority. In matters of minor moment, this is deemed sufficient to roll over on the promoters the weight of the responsibility. But where the act is of such a character as to involve guilt or shame, the minority who wish to divest themselves of all responsibility, not only record their dissent, but publish their protest, and withdraw from all participation in the matter protested against; and only when the protest is made as public as the crime against which it is entered, can the protestant be freed from responsibility. It was from such an act as this that the name “Protestant” came to be applied to the opposers of Rome. When, in 1529, Charles V. obtained from the Diet of Spire a decree depriving the reformers of liberty of worship, the followers of both Luther and Zwingli joined in an earnest protest, and thus earned for themselves and their followers the name of “Protestants.” It was by this means that the followers of Cameron, Cargill and Renwick undertook to clear their skirts of the guilt brought on Scotland by the persecution and bloodshed of the last of the Stuarts. They nailed up their protest, abjuring the tyrant, and renouncing their allegiance.

3. *Martyr.* This word is simply the Greek for witness, and is used as a more emphatic expression to indicate a witness who seals his testimony with his blood. As already intimated, a faithful testimony, an earnest protest against a community as guilty of criminal conduct, especially if the charge be clearly made out, will goad the consciences of the guilty parties and torment them. As a result, they will endeavor to silence the witness, and suppress the testimony. If the witness be faithful and earnest, the

effort to suppress and silence will only intensify and make public, and still farther torment and aggravate, and when argument fails, the “*ultima ratio regum*,” the last argument of kings, will be resorted to, and martyr blood be shed. But this always produced the opposite effect of that intended. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” It is a seal to their testimony. It attests the sincerity of the witness and his sense of the importance of the truth for which he lays down his life. And then it publishes the truth for which he died. Men cannot close their ears to the cry of blood, nor be indifferent to the charge on which a human being is executed; and when that charge is one which their own consciences recognize to be a virtue, and not a crime, it awakens a tide of sympathy and a spirit of resistance that enlists recruits for the cause in which the martyr suffers. So these terms express but different phases of one great idea—“testimony”—openly proclaimed and practically exemplified and in the last extremity sealed with blood.

Let us now turn our attention to the question in hand.

II. What is the power or efficacy of testimony?

1. *It is the power of truth.* “Truth is mighty and will prevail.”

“Truth crushed to earth will rise again,
The eternal years of God are her’s;
While error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers.”

It was the conclusion of ancient philosophers that the universal specific for all ills, and the source of all blessing, was Truth. But when the question was asked, What is Truth? they were unable to answer, and it never was answered till Christ answered it by the declaration, “I am the truth.” No one is willing to be regarded as holding or propagating a lie, although many do this knowingly; yet it is an acknowledgment of weakness, and is sure in the end to bring disaster on those who are guilty of it. But truth, to be effective, must be proclaimed, and advocated and witnessed. It is like a sword, which, while in the scabbard, is useless, but wielded by a skilful hand, is mighty.

2. *It consists partly in the courage and determination with which it is advocated.* These qualities constitute the leader and the hero. The man who is afraid to utter his convictions, no matter how unpopular they may be, or how great danger he may incur, or how great loss he may experience, is not the material of which martyrs are made, or by whom victory is achieved. He who suppresses truth for fear of a sneer, or of social ostracism, or of the lack of his bread and butter, may win a short lived popularity, but need not fear the martyr’s stake or hope for the martyr’s crown. That which a brave people most admire is true courage, and the man who, like Luther, could nail his theses to the cathedral door and pronounce his emphatic “No!” in the face of a frowning world, has in him an element that will attract brave hearts around him, and bind them to him as the magnet does the steel. It is this makes tyrants tremble and makes heroes brave. It was this that made the name of John Brown the watchword of liberty and the death knell of slavery. The curse of Christianity to-day is a cowardly pulpit, silenced by the butter-horn of favor or by the guillotine of fear. As in the days of slavery’s reign, the pulpit is muzzled, the press subsidized, and the people are perishing for lack of

knowledge. Let the ministry, as John the Baptist did, go to the wilderness and cry "Repent!" and the people will throng to their ministry and the kingdom of Christ will come. Let them, like the martyrs of Scotland, nail up their protest and fly to the mountains, and the tyrant will fly and the era of liberty will dawn. But to be effective, this testimony must be consistent. A man may declare from the pulpit or the platform, "Your Constitution is infidel; the oath of your President is atheistic; the Government is virtually in rebellion against the Lord and his Christ," but if that man turns around and votes under that Constitution, and swears or elects another as his representative to swear that godless oath, where is his testimony? Does he not stultify himself and neutralize his testimony? Hence men who value their consistency are silent, and men who prefer the loaves and fishes to Christ are on the other side. This sort of timid and half-hearted testimony was borne against slavery, and no one cared, till Garrison denounced the Constitution as "a covenant with death and a league with hell." Then slavery began to tremble; and when John Brown went down to Harper's Ferry, she knew her hour had come. Actions speak louder than words, and deeds bespeak courage and determination, awaken opposition, and lead to victory.

3. *Testimony is the human part of the divine arrangement in which God Himself achieves the victory.* "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."—Zech. iv. 7. God has undertaken to do this work, and He does not intend that man shall bear the glory, or even think that his own arm has gotten him the victory. As in the days of Joshua, God intended to throw down the walls of Jericho, still He required Joshua and the children of Israel to march around those walls and blow their trumpets and shout. Yet it was not the tread of the soldiers, nor the blast of the trumpets, nor the shout of the people, that threw down the walls. These only proclaimed God's testimony, and He did the work. So Gideon, warring against the Midianites, was first required to reduce his army of thirty-two thousand to three hundred, lest they should say "mine own hand hath saved me;" then to scatter them around three sides of the Midianitish host, to break their pitchers, wave their lamps, blow their trumpets, and shout "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and then the Lord turned every man's sword against his fellow in the host of Midian. They uttered the testimony and God wrought the victory. The Lord gave the word, they published it, and kings and their armies were routed and fled. So in our late struggle, the testimony of God's witnesses arrayed the slave-owning South against the slave-holding North, and they turned every man his sword against his fellow, until God made it a "military necessity" to free the slave, in order to stop the fratricidal struggle and save the nation.

There is nothing more certain than that "God will arise and plead the cause that is His own." He has said to His Son, "I will declare the decree. * * * Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance; thou shalt break them as with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." God has entrusted to his Church the work of warning them (Ezek. xxxiii. 1, 8.) If the watchman does not warn them, they perish and their blood is on the watchman's skirts. If he warns them and they do not heed his warning—they perish, but he has delivered his soul. If he warns them and they repent they are saved.

Christ has declared, Matt. xxiv. 14: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come." It is not ours to inquire whether our rams'-horn trumpets will bring down the walls of Jericho, or scatter the host of Midian, but to blow and shout and leave God to do His part in His own way.

Some good, honest Christians think it will not do to stand off and blow the trumpets, but they must help the Lord to do His part and go and give the wall a push. Poor, simple souls, the Lord don't need their help, and certainly he does not ask them to swear to support it, in order to destroy it. He never requires us to violate His revealed will in order to bring about His secret purpose—"to do evil that good may come." They had better get out of the way lest the wall fall on and crush them. Mordecai, at the gate of King Ahasuerus, refuses to bow to Haman, the Jew's enemy. "Foolish man," say our worldly wise friends, "he will get into trouble. What can a poor Jew do against the Prime Minister of a mighty nation?" He does not know what he can do, but he knows his present duty and there he stands a stalwart witness and refuses to bow. Sure enough he does get into trouble, and brings his people into trouble. They are all condemned to die, and his own scaffold is erected. Still he does not bow. He waits for God and does his duty, and God comes in just at the right time, delivers His servant, hangs Haman on his own gallows, turns the edict of destruction into a blessing, revolutionizes the empire and elevates Mordecai to the highest position. The devil says to Christ as He sets before Him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them: "I know that you have come to undertake the work of bringing all these kingdoms back to their allegiance to God. It is a stupendous undertaking. You run fearful risks; rivers of blood will flow, and your own among the first. Now I propose to compromise the matter. I will surrender the whole into your hands without a struggle if you will give me one simple act of homage." Christ indignantly scorns the offer, and challenges the adversary to do his worst. Does this look like swearing allegiance to a rebellion in order to overthrow it, or swearing the horrid oaths of a Molly Maguire lodge in order to obtain their secrets, and bring them to punishment? Of such, the divine declaration is, "their damnation is just." Even the heathen might teach such Christians morality. Their maxim was: "Do right, though the heavens should fall."

I repeat then that the part of the church of Christ and His ministers, is to bear testimony and proclaim it, vindicate it, practise it, suffer for it, if need be seal it with your blood. The more it is assailed the better. The greater your trials and dangers the nearer the victory. God never has failed to do his part, and He never will. Just as soon as this Gospel of the kingdom is preached for a testimony to the nation the end will come. It will repent, fall into line and serve the Master, or perish.

This nation is in rebellion against the Lord and His Christ to-day, just as really as the Confederate States were in rebellion against the Government eighteen years ago. It has set up a government in the territory of the Lord, and over the subjects of the Lord, without any acknowledgment of His authority. Is that not rebellion? You say the Constitution is generally a good one. So was the Constitution of the Confederacy not only a good one, but almost a transcript of the United States Constitution. It simply failed to recognize the authority of the Government in whose territory and over whose people it was set up, and when the nation de-

manded its submission, it resisted. Could this nation do anything less than reduce it to subjection? Must it not reduce the rebellion or itself cease to be? As President Lincoln said when he started to Washington, "I am going to see whether we have a government or not." Is not God saying to us, "Shall I not visit for these things, shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Through our lips as His witnesses He is saying, "Now, therefore, kings be wise, be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord in fear. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish when his anger is kindled but a little."—Ps. ii. 10-12.

Witness for Christ, publish his message. Warn the nation of its sin and danger. Save your country if you can; at least clear your own skirts of its blood. Bear cheerfully whatever odium it may cost. Suffer willingly whatever loss you may sustain. Meet courageously whatever danger you may incur. Dare to do or die, for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus; and ever remember that "the witnesses shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

The objection is raised: Why should the Reformed Presbyterian Church make the acceptance of this attitude of practical protest a term of communion, and visit with discipline the exercise of the elective franchise? These objectors agree that "our doctrine regarding the Constitution is right, but claim that it ought to be left as a matter of conscience and doctrinal teaching, and not made a term of communion."

My answer to this is, that such a course would at once vitiate the whole power of our protest. As a witnessing protesting church, giving practical effect to our testimony by our action, it must be manifest to all that to be effective it must be consistent. The moral attitude of a church is no higher than the lowest position which she permits any of her members to occupy. If, then, the Church should tolerate the exercise of the elective franchise by any of her members, it would be competent to objectors to deny her attitude of practical protest altogether, on the ground that certain members, with her consent, voted and held office. She would no longer be a protesting Church, and persons who desired to become protestors would no longer become such by joining her communion. The advantage of being a Covenanter would be lost.

The object of forming such an association and of joining such an association, consists in being identified with an organization known in the past, and at the present, to occupy the position of protest uniformly and consistently, so that identification with the body at once notifies all cognizant of the fact, what principles you propose and what attitude you occupy.

I know a prominent professor in the leading Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, who not only holds the same views in regard to the Constitution that we do, but who also abstains from voting for the same reason. By so doing he clears his skirts of the criminality of personal identification with a godless government; but he fails to give the power to his protest, which it would have were he identified with a church which believed as he believes and practised as he practises. But more, by being identified with a church that allows its members to identify with the government, his ecclesiastical influence is thrown in favor of such identification, while his personal influence, as far as known, is thrown the other way. His influence in favor of the wrong is as wide and great as the great church with which he is identified, while his influence for the right is as narrow as the limited number to whom his practise is known. He

may as well remain where he is as unite with a church that permits her members to vote or not at their option. The church in which he is does that.

For the same reason it becomes necessary that the Church should close her pulpits and communion tables against those who identify with a godless government, or with secret oath-bound societies, or who violate personally, or in their ecclesiastical relations, the order and worship which Christ has instituted in his Church, as it is only in this way that she can maintain her testimony and hold up a consistent protest against these violations of the law of her God. 2 Thess. iii. 6. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us." We testify not only against the government as in rebellion, but also against the churches which permit their members to identify with that rebellion, and which fail to lift up a standard against it. The Church was organized as an army under Christ her Captain, to reduce the great rebellion against the Government of God. "The weapons of her warfare, though not carnal, are mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of Satan." These weapons are her "blood-sealed testimony," and her work will not be finished till the voices are heard in heaven saying, "The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." If any part of the Lord's host turn their backs in the day of battle, they weaken the hands of their comrades, and make it necessary to lift up a testimony against them also as deserters from the ranks. Micaiah, the Son of Imlah, was under the necessity of testifying not only against Ahab the King, but also against the prophets who encouraged him in his evil course. He declared that the "Lord had put a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Jeremiah is forced to complain "that a wonderful and a horrible thing is done in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely—the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

Whatever others may fail to speak, or may say in favor of those ministers who, after swearing the covenant of 1871, have turned their backs on the testimony, and on the witnessing band with whom they so solemnly covenanted to stand, I feel bound, in fidelity to the cause, to give a friendly warning to them. It is well for men to understand that when they leave a Church of unquestioned orthodoxy that is small and unpopular, for one that is large and popular, thoughtful persons will regard with suspicion their plea of "conscience." Men will be constrained to ask: If their consciences are so tender that they can no longer adhere to their covenant engagements to testify to their Redeemer's right to reign over the nations, and to regulate the praises of His Church, how will their consciences enjoy communion at the Lord's table with Masons, Odd Fellows and Rumsellers—not one of whom are debarred from the Communion into which they have made defection. Men who, in the maturity of their powers, and after years of ministerial work in the Church, have solemnly sworn their allegiance to its principles and then deserted them, will have no easy task to persuade either those whom they have deserted, or those to whom they have gone, of their honesty, but will learn when it is too late that they are not trusted. The verdict in their case, given by the Spirit of God in the 78th Psalm, is: "For though their words were good, their hearts with Him were not sincere; unsteadfast and perfidious they in His Covenant were."