

# A Witnessing Church

by Seth Rees

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*A church's testimony is its power to share the gospel and bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:32, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:20, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Revelation 12:11

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Seth Rees emphasizes the importance of active and spontaneous witnessing as a vital aspect of a thriving church, highlighting how testimony is essential for reaching the unsaved and maintaining a powerful spiritual center. He contrasts the ineffectiveness of increased religious activities or intellectual debates with the compelling force of genuine, experiential testimonies that stem from a life filled with the Holy Ghost. Rees recounts historical examples of persecution against public witnessing, illustrating the unwavering commitment of martyrs and the enduring need for bold testimonies in the face of opposition. He stresses that true spirituality in the church is evidenced by a fervent desire to testify to God's work, even in the midst of adversity and threats.

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## Transcript

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me." "They all began to speak." Spontaneously, instinctively, the witnessing tongue began to vibrate. Never once did the fire-touched disciples think of sitting down and holding a silent meeting. Equally foreign to them was the idea of hiring someone one to speak for them or to sing for them. Testimony is the invariable concomitant of life in a church. Only when the church has drifted from her great spiritual center and ignored and rejected the Holy Ghost has she lost her testimony.

Numerous and diverse are the substitutes offered in place of this God-ordained and God-originated way of stopping the mouth of the world and raining heart thrilling conviction upon the soul. Sometimes increased religious activity is proffered in lieu of testimony. However good this activity may be, it will never produce the end God intended testimony should produce. If the "great unwashed," the unsaved and unattracted about us are ever reached it will not be by essays on the harmony between science and religion. It will not be by learned treatises in defense of orthodoxy, or rose-scented, high-school-girl themes on "The March of the Nineteenth Century." These subjects may be of value to the preacher for mental discipline, but they are not only hard on a congregation but they utterly fail to save men from sin and a yawning hell!

A live church has a ceaseless ringing testimony. It has been well said that "A voiceless church is a powerless church. The Holy Ghost is the power for witnessing. He gives the testimony irresistible, unanswerable force? Men are reached not by argument, not by logical syllogisms, but by the testimony of

really live witnesses, witnesses who have convictions born of certainty, who "speak that they do know." An objector can meet logic with logic, Greek roots with Greek roots, and the jargon of the schools with the same language; but he does not know what to do with experience, with what is positively known.

The devil's hottest persecution has always been directed against public witnessing. No one has ever suffered opposition for having piety in the heart merely; a few have encountered it for possessing godliness in the home; but the concentrated powers of earth and hell have ever been marshalled against public witnessing for Jesus. Rome's energies were exhausted in an attempt to crash the testimonies of the early churches. Ten fierce persecutions followed one another in quick succession. To be a witness meant to die, so that the word for witness (martyr) came to mean one who died for "the testimony of Jesus." But although hundreds of thousands spilled their blood yet the churches "multiplied and grew." During the severe persecution of the early Quakers, when the adult members were imprisoned until there were none to keep up the public meetings, and it seemed as if this public testimony must cease, the children of the Friends, ten, twelve and thirteen years of age, met together and maintained the meetings while the fathers and mothers were in jail. Persecution, fierce and savage, greeted this youthful piety, but no power on earth or in hell could withstand their fire-filled witnessing. Red-hot rings were put on their tongues, and yet with indistinct, pitiful words they would still testify.

On one occasion three Quaker ministers were to be burned at the stake. The persecutors so arranged that the second and third should witness the death of the first, while the third was to behold the torture of both first and second. The three men agreed among themselves that the one who was burned first should, if his faith failed not, testify in the last moment of his consciousness by lifting up one hand, thus encouraging the other two. The first of the martyrs was led forth, tied to the stake, and enveloped by the rising flame. When he had burned almost to a crisp and they thought he would never move again, the sufferer lifted both hands over his head and clapped them three times. Though racks and dungeons and stakes are no longer in vogue, yet testimony is as much needed and as much hated as in the days of virulent, violent persecution.

When spirituality runs low in the church, class-meetings, prayer-meetings, covenant-meetings, and testimony-meetings are sparsely attended, while in the same church throngs crowd to the fairs, the festivals, the bazaars, the bean suppers, the donkey parties and the entertainments. Contrast with this condition of affairs a church "filled with the Spirit." Witnessing meetings are large and the childish rattles which we have mentioned are no longer needed.

When a man really receives the Holy Ghost, he wants to testify to what God has done for and in him. An impelling power constrains him to speak even in the gaunt face of grim death. If those who have died for Jesus' sake had but held their peace there would have been no martyrs. They were offered their lives if they would but keep still. No one told them not to "live it "but" teach no more in this name." All the opposition which pitted itself against Jesus was due to his public preaching and work. If he had moved around quietly, if he had delivered lectures on the Talmud instead of preaching the "Sermon on the Mount," if he had talked hazily of evolution instead of exhorting to holiness, the Jews would never have risen to put him to death. "Live it, but keep still about it," says the devil; but life is made up largely of what we say, and he who shuts out the Son of God from his speech debars Him from his heart. Let him refrain from a confession of the Holy Ghost, and he will not have power to live it anywhere. "Heart-faith" and "lip-confession" are twins, and must not, can not, be separated.

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