

Dt. 19:15-21 (LD 43) “Two Or Three Witnesses”

For the Children: The Bible puts a lot of emphasis on “witnesses.” Perhaps you have called on others to back up your story – others who have seen what really happened. God calls us to be witnesses to His truth. He Himself witnesses our vows e.g., in profession of faith. He is not pleased when we give a false witness – or try to make Him a witness to a lie. Therefore, we must be careful not to make false accusations against others. This is often done by gossip or slander – when we spread rumours without checking the facts; or try to harm someone else’s reputation. If we love the Lord, Love our neighbour and love the truth, we will want to speak only the truth about our neighbour, to build him up not ruin him; and to give a good witness to the Lord.

Questions: Why is it important to have 2-3 witnesses when we make accusations against others? What should be our motive when we bring charges against others? How can gossip and slander harm the church?

Introduction:

First Point: Properly Witnessed

- 1) Two or Three Witnesses: A “witness” is someone who repeats what he himself has seen or heard (firsthand). Two or three such witnesses were required when charges were laid in Israel. See also Dt. 17:6. This is also in force in church discipline in the NT (Mt. 18:16). The requirement helps protect the innocent from false accusation and protect the truth
- 2) No Single Witness: If there was only one witness, the charge should not even be laid (v. 15). This may result in the guilty going free, but that is better than finding the innocent guilty. After all, the Lord will still bring justice upon the guilty.

Second Point: Properly Investigated

- 1) Judges to Investigate: When the case was difficult, e.g., the other witnesses did not end up testifying, the matter was to be heard by priests and judges appointed for the task, at the Lord’s sanctuary. These judges were to investigate thoroughly. This, too, helped protect the innocent and uphold the truth.
- 2) Before the Lord: Israel was a “theocracy.” These cases were heard at the Lord’s sanctuary, in His presence, with the priests involved, according to His laws. Lying would then make Him a Witness to untruth – a matter of blasphemy, like perjury. It was also against the truth and against one’s neighbour and brother.

Third Point: Properly Disciplined:

- 1) The Malicious Witness: The one who brings false accusation here is “malicious” – violent, cruel and wicked; he does great “evil” (vss. 19, 20). For he is endangering the church (v. 20), as well as his neighbour and brother for whom Christ died; attacking the truth; and blaspheming the Lord. This is not some “honest mistake.” This is why gossip and slander are warned about in the NT (2 Cor. 12:20; Jam. 4:11). James also warns against usurping the Lord’s role as Judge.
- 2) Eye for Eye: That is why the penalty is severe. The punishment must match the crime (the “lex talionis” of v. 21). If the man unjustly sought to have a man killed by the judicial system, that is attempted murder, deserving death. If he unjustly sought to steal from the other, he must compensate him in measure. For lying brings down God’s judgement (LD 43; Rev. 21:8). Church discipline is today’s equivalent.

Fourth Point: For the Good of the Church

- 1) Evil Purged: Discipline is for the good of the church - it “purges” the evil leaven from the church. Otherwise, the church may be harmed by the spreading of injustice and dishonesty, and by divisions.
- 2) Evil Deterred: The penalty also deters others in the church from following the evil example. However, the greatest deterrent to false witness and lying – and the biggest incentive to uphold the name of others and to uphold the truth – is to keep before us the God of Truth, the Great Judge, who has placed His image in our neighbour and given a “new name” to our brethren.

Conclusion: