



WOW: Word Of the Week

Testify

October 7, 2020

“You have been called to testify!” That notice is even more dreaded than being called to jury duty! You already recognize that I am not talking about legal matters, but spiritual.

Hebrews 11 begins and ends with a verb that is difficult to translate (vv. 2, 39). The active form of the verb means “to witness, to testify.” But in Hebrews 11, the verb appears in the passive voice. The word appears in 12:1 as a noun. Connecting these three verses will help us see our challenge!

Contemporary translations have tried to capture the passive verb form: commend, receive a good report, witness borne about them, approved, pleasing to God. How does one move from the active voice to the passive -- to be testified about?

The **passive** means that the subject does not perform the action but receives the action. In Hebrews 11, those mentioned are not testifying. They are the subject of the testimony. They are not witnessing – they are “being witnessed about.” Look at the three verses.

11:2 – exhibiting this kind of faith, referring to the certainty and conviction of v. 1, these “were witnessed.” Hebrews 11 is a testimony about faithful people who believed God and believed God’s promises. Again, those mentioned are not giving the testimony. The testimony is about them.

11:39 – these all, being witnessed about, did not receive the promise.

12:1 – those reading the book are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses – likely those of Heb. 11.

I suggest a way to show the connection of the three verses.

11:2, across the centuries of history, these people of God were the subject of testimony because of their faith.

“Testimony was given about these because of their faith.”

11:39, although testimony was given because of (or, through) their faith, none of these received the promise.

“Testimony was given because of (through) their faith, but none received the promise.”

12:1, these who provide such testimony are a great cloud surrounding the recipients.

For the moment, let us relish, rejoice in the great truth. Throughout history, God’s people have served as witnesses to his existence and his faithfulness. People of confidence and conviction, believing promises and seeing the unseen. As they testify with their lives, others have noticed and testified about them and the truths they upheld.

Today, we are the people of God, we are called to testify. We are not firsthand witnesses of the Christ as were the apostles. But those in Hebrews 11 were not firsthand witnesses. They never saw or received the promise of God in Christ. But they testified. We have been called to testify!

We are surrounded by a great cloud of those who provide testimony. The focus is on their testimony—God is faithful! Let us proclaim with our lives and with our lips the same great truth!