

## **The Testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses**

Article by Mark Woodson

*“By the testimony of two or three witnesses let every word be established.”*

This is a very well known statement in many parts of Christ’s body. More often than not it is used as a means of establishing the veracity of a doctrine. If a tenant or teaching can be found in 2 or three separate locations, representing more than one independent example, then it is considered established doctrine due to this “rule”.

This brief article is here to examine whether or not this is a legitimate practice for establishing the dependable veracity of a teaching as Christian doctrine.

Well of note is that this statement appears under both covenants. What may be of particular import to some is that the majority of them appear in the New Testament and are used in the exact same manner as in the Old.

These examples are found in **Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19 & in Heb. 10:28.**

To be thorough I will list all of these with enough surrounding verses to correctly understand their individual settings.

### **Deuteronomy 17:2-6,**

*“(2) If a man or woman among you in one of your towns that the LORD your God will give you is discovered doing evil in the sight of the LORD your God and violating His covenant (3) and has gone to worship other gods by bowing down to the sun, moon, or all the stars in the sky--which I have forbidden-- (4) and if you are told or hear about it, you must investigate it thoroughly. If the report turns out to be true that this detestable thing has happened in **Israel**, (5) you must bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing and stone them to death. (6) THE ONE*

CONDEMNED TO DIE IS TO BE EXECUTED ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

NO ONE IS TO BE EXECUTED ON THE TESTIMONY OF A SINGLE WITNESS!"

**Deuteronomy 19:15,**

"(15) ONE WITNESS CANNOT ESTABLISH ANY WRONGDOING OR SIN AGAINST A PERSON, WHATEVER THAT PERSON HAS DONE. A FACT MUST BE ESTABLISHED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES."

**Matthew 18:15-16,**

"(15) *If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) But if he won't listen, take ONE OR TWO MORE WITH YOU, SO THAT BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE ESTABLISHED.*"

**2 Corinthians 13:1-4,**

"(1) This is the **THIRD TIME** I am coming to you. ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD WILL BE CONFIRMED. (2) I gave warning, and I give warning--as when I was present the second time, so now while I am absent--to **those who sinned before and to all the rest: if I come again, I will not be lenient,** (3) since you seek proof of Christ speaking in me. He is not weak toward you, but powerful among you. (4) In fact, He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by God's power. For we also are weak in Him, yet toward you we will live with Him by God's power."

**1 Timothy 5:19-21,**

"(19) **Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.** (20) Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will also be afraid. (21) I solemnly charge you, before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism."

## Hebrews 10:28-29,

*“(28) If anyone disregards **Moses' law**, he dies without mercy, **BASED ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES**. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”*

As is abundantly clear - each of these cases is NOT regarding establishing a doctrine, but the truthfulness and reliability of a moral or legal claim against a brother or sister in the faith. All of these verses speak of confirming a thing's truthfulness by these eye-witness testimonies.

So can this be used to establish doctrines? Personally I believe it can! I own this as a personal belief, but one in which I believe is warranted based upon the *spirit* of the reason for this rule in regard to properly judging people.

If something only appears once in all of scripture, it hardly warrants claiming it to set the precedence for a Christian doctrine in all similar cases. Such is too subjective to stand the test of honest scrutiny.

If however, we see a teaching or example at least three SEPARATE times, confirmed by Jesus, the Apostles or the scriptures at large - I believe it is warranted to assume it is an established doctrine given that all of the particulars in each case are the same.

So while such was not the original use of this statement nor its ongoing mentions throughout scripture - I believe it sets a bar by which other truths may be established, including doctrine!

Blessings!