

The Witness of God

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[0:00] The last time we were in 1 John, we covered the first five verses of chapter 5, and there! we saw three characteristics of true believers. One of those characteristics is faith. Specifically, that's faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We saw that in verse 1.

chapter 5. Verse 1 says, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who is begotten of him. John reiterated the same theme a different way in verses 4 and 5. He said there, For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? As we move into new material tonight, we'll see even more reasons why we can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We'll see the witness of God himself.

And the term witness is the theme of this section. The passage concerns the witness or testimony of God and the Spirit in the world regarding the great truth that Jesus is indeed God. The previous passage in verses 1 through 5 described overcomers as those who believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. And here, John presents God's own testimony to confirm that Jesus is the Christ. We'll see two kinds of testimony tonight. We'll see external testimony and internal testimony. And a form of the word translated witness occurs no fewer than nine times in the verses that we'll look at tonight. John's purpose is to demonstrate that there's more than adequate evidence to prove that Jesus is the Son of God who provides eternal life to all who believe in him. Testimony presents itself from different but unified voices as we go through the passage. We'll read the verses tonight first from the New King James. But how many of you have the ESV or the NASV translation tonight? When I read the New King James, you'll see it includes some wording that the NASV and the ESV leave out. We'll talk about why that is after we read it from the New King James. So starting with verse 6 of 1 John 5, it says, This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not only by water, but by water and blood.

And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. And these three agree as one.

[3:07] If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For this is the witness of God, which he has testified of his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself.

He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of his Son. And this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son does not have life.

The difference between translations comes at the beginning of verse 7. The New King James verse 7 reads, For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one.

The ESV and NASB only have this for verse 7. They simply say, For there are three that testify. No mention is made there of the three that bear witness in heaven. The question then in deciding which version is more authentic is not based on the truthfulness of the statement, but on the external manuscript evidence.

In other words, just because a statement is true doesn't make it scripture. This is not a question of the inspiration of the text, but rather the transmission of the text. John's letter, whatever the original said, is inerrant, and what we have to establish then is what the autographs actually said.

[4:40] John's letter, the main reason is that the ESV and NASB follow manuscripts that are older than those that have been found when the King James and the New King James manuscripts were

written. So the oldest witness of this text occur in Latin manuscripts of the 7th century, and the passage added by the King James and the New King James only appears in eight Greek manuscripts, none of which can be dated before 1400. So they're over 700 years later than the ones that the ESV and NASB followed. Not only does the manuscript evidence favor omission of the passage, but the same is true concerning the testimony of the early church. Not one Greek or Latin church father ever quotes this passage in the first four and a half centuries after Christ. So this is really revealing in light of the controversy over the Trinity, because you can see that the added passage deals with the Trinity. So if it was part of the original text, then this would have been a great passage to quote in order to prove the Trinity. There's additional intrigue about why the passage was added to the King James and the New King James. But for our purposes tonight, we'll skip that story and go back to the text itself. And because the ESV bases its translation on the older manuscripts, we'll use the ESV for the source of the remainder of the lesson. So here are verses 6 through 12 in the ESV. They say, this is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is true. For there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. For this is the testimony of God that he is born concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God is born concerning his Son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life. And this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

We're going to see three things from the text tonight. The first is the assertion. And that assertion comes in verses 6 through 8. We just read them, but listen to 6 through 8 one more time.

They say, this is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood. And these three agree. Two things are mentioned prominently in these verses. The water and the blood. Water and the blood constitute external objective witness to who Jesus Christ is. They refer to Jesus' baptism. That's where the water comes from.

[7:59] And also Jesus' death. That's where the reference to the blood comes from. So John is really dealing with the people who claim that the Christ Spirit actually descended on the human Jesus when he was baptized and then left him before he was crucified. John writes to show that God has given testimony to the deity of Jesus through both his baptism and death. Listen to Matthew 3, 13 through 17 for the familiar passage on Jesus' baptism. Again, this is Matthew 3, 13 through 17, and it says, Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. So from these verses, you see God testifying at the water that Jesus is God's Son. We can cite several passages for how God testified through Jesus' blood that Jesus is God's Son, but I'm going to go to Mark 15, 33 through 39, for a succinct but thorough confirmation about how the crucifixion proved that Jesus is God's Son.

So Mark 15, 33 through 39 say this, And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. Mark recorded five phenomena that accompanied Jesus' death. The first was the darkness itself that we heard about in 1533. The second was Jesus' first cry,

where he cried, My God, my God. The third was Jesus' loud cry right before he died. The fourth was the temple curtain being torn from top to bottom.

And then the fifth was the Roman centurion's confession. So let's look at those in a little more detail. Because between noon and 3 p.m. there was darkness. This was not a solar eclipse. The darkness represents lament. It also represents divine judgment. Then Jesus uttered the opening words of Psalm 22, and in doing so he cried out to God in the middle of immense pain and divine abandonment. And he suffered that as a substitute for sinful mankind, including all of us. But yet the following verses of Psalm 22 also anticipate divine intervention on Jesus' behalf. Jesus knows exactly why he's experiencing this God-forsakenness, just as he knows that his death is not going to be the end of the story. The final loud cry that Jesus made is probably the cry of victory. We know that that's translated, it is finished. And once

Jesus dies, all mocking ceases in Mark's account. And Jesus died around the time of the daily afternoon sacrifice in the temple. Something else is significant about that final loud cry.

Demonstrating amazing strength in the middle of the intense suffering that he'd endured, the shout itself really reveals that his life did not slowly ev away, but he voluntarily gave up his life. Then simultaneous with Jesus' death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And the passive verb and the direction of the tear indicate that this was God's action. It was a sign that Jesus' death ended the need for repeated sacrifice for sins, but instead opened the new and living way of free and direct access to God. All of those signs of the signs of the cross point to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. As we read the verses, you probably also notice that the verses mention that the Spirit testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. We could spend all night looking at proof of that. Instead, we'll look at just a few cross references about how the Spirit also testifies that Jesus is God. The very first one that we'll look at occurred even before Jesus' incarnation. I'm talking about Luke 1, 26 through 35. We most often read that around Christmas, but that is the passage that says this. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the same, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call his name [14 : 20] Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. So you can see there that the Holy Spirit is involved in testifying that Jesus is the Son of God. Then if we go to Acts 10 38, Peter talked about how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. And the verse goes on to say, He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. Earlier we read from Matthew, and Matthew 3 16 talks about how the Spirit testified to Jesus's identity at Jesus's baptism. Matthew 3 16 said, The heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.

Matthew 3 16 said, The heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Son of God's baptism. And the second thing we'll see tonight is the explanation of why God's witness is so important. That explanation comes in verses 9 and 10. Verses 9 and 10 of 1 John 5 say, If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. For this is the testimony of God that he is born concerning his Son.

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God is born concerning his Son.

God's own authority and approval have been stamped on the truth of the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ. God's own authority and approval has been baptized. Because we believe the testimony of man, how much more should we believe the testimony of God? Remember that in Jewish jurisprudence, the testimony of two or three witnesses was sufficient to be received as the truth. How much more so should we receive it as truth if God himself offers three divine witnesses to prove his case? The testimony of God then, whose divine being incorporates the divinity of the Son

and the Spirit is superior in both status and force to the testimony of man, because it's trustworthy. John's point is that we should accept God's testimony precisely because it is God's testimony about his Son. John's going back to the threefold testimony in verse 8. That's where God testified concerning his Son in the past through the Spirit, the water, and the blood. And that testimony is still as valid today as it ever has been. In the strongest possible terms, John is saying that divine authority is behind his teaching. It's not merely John's testimony. It's God's testimony that [17:42] John is telling us about. When a man does accept God's testimony concerning his Son, God seals the truth by giving the man the witness of the Spirit in the man himself. On the other hand, if somebody disbelieves God, he makes God out to be a liar because he hasn't believed the testimony that God has given about his Son. Sometimes we hear about people thinking that they can accept or reject God's testimony concerning Christ, that John would have them know that to reject that testimony is to accuse God of being a liar.

And we see that from verse 10. Let's dig a little bit more into the implications of believing or disbelieving God's witness. The one who believes in God's Son is the one who affirms God's testimony concerning his Son. According to John, believing in Jesus as the Son of God is equivalent to accepting God's testimony about his Son. The result then is that the Christian has God's testimony in his heart.

The phrase suggests that John is referring to the inner testimony of the Spirit in the heart of the believer. This inward witness of God's Spirit shows the Christian that he was right to believe in Jesus.

And this internal testimony of the Spirit balances and complements the external and historical witness of the water and the blood. Of course, we said that's the baptism and death of Jesus, which also marked the limits of his earthly ministry. So you can see we have both the internal and external testimony.

Let's look at the other side. If we reject God's testimony, we make God out to be a liar. John leaves no room for ignorance or misconception there. To reject the witness is to deny the truthfulness of God. God has spoken directly and he's acted deliberately with absolute clearness. The testimony has been borne out and things were not done in a corner. Everything that Jesus did necessary to prove that he was God was done in public for people to see and it was of course recorded for us to see as well.

[19:59] The witness must therefore either be accepted or rejected. He can't be ignored or explained away. Another point is that belief in the Father can't be separated from belief in the Son. If we do that, the charge of making God out to be a liar is serious. John is likely countering the teachings of his day who would say that it was possible to believe in God, but disbelieve what God has said about his Son.

God's witness to the world is that his Son is Jesus Christ, but people will still not believe. He can't believe. They accept the witness of men, but they reject the witness of God. And when we reject the witness of God, we make him out to be a liar.

All God asks is that we trust his word and we can rely on the inner witness of the Spirit as he uses the word. Verses 11 and 12 then have the third thing we need to see tonight. And these verses show the culmination.

That culmination will happen for everyone in eternity. For some, the culmination will be life. For others, the culmination will be death.

Let's read verses 11 through 12 again and we'll see that. 1 John 5, 11 and 12 say, And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

[21:31] 1 John 5, 11 and 12 says, The first word of verse 11, the this, points forward to the rest of the verse.

Like we saw with the previous verse, the nature of this testimony involves God's witness about his Son. You notice that John does not specifically state the content of the testimony.

Instead, he states the result of that testimony, which is nothing other than eternal life. So the question whether we accept God's testimony or not is more than a merely academic one.

Our answer to that question will determine whether we participate in eternal life. That's what makes it so important. The last part of the verse is then perhaps God's main point.

God's testimony concerning his Son does result in eternal life. But the point to stress is that eternal life is only available in his Son.

[22:41] God's testimony is that his Son is the only means by which one can receive the gift of eternal life, which by implication then means that God has given divine approval to the earthly ministry of his Son.

John is clearly an exclusiveness there with respect to salvation. And that conviction here in verse 11 is restated with greater force in verse 12.

So where do you think John learned that Jesus is the only way for salvation? Think about what he said in his Gospel when he quoted Jesus in John 14 6.

That's where Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So based on John 14 6 and then 1 John 5 11, that's why we see that the culmination is inevitable.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. Whoever has the Son has life.

[23:52] Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. He recognizes that, of course, as 1 John 5 12. In parallel clauses there, John states the relation between having the Son and having life.

To possess the Son is to possess life in all its fullness. Holding to the biblical faith means possessing Christ himself, as well as the life that the Father grants to those who trust his Son. And, of course, we have to trust his Son as both Lord and Savior. Ultimately, then, what matters is our relationship to the Son. This life is not something only to be received in the future, but it's also a present possession.

Notice the present tense of the verb has life in verse 12. It doesn't say we'll have life. It says whoever has the Son has life.

So we have it already. The other thing to remember is that eternal life is not earned or merited, but it's a gift given by God to those who have the Son.

[25:04] The two clauses of verse 12 are almost directly opposite of each other. But John does change the second clause slightly to emphasize his teaching a little bit more.

The first difference is noticeable in our English translation. The second difference is visible in the original Greek. The first slight difference is the addition of God to the Son in the second half of verse 12.

John reminds his readers that the Father and the Son are inseparable, and that it's impossible to have God as one's Father without acknowledging Jesus as God's Son.

Think of the false religions that claim to believe in Jesus, yet they deny that Jesus is the Son of God. John makes it clear that for people to have life, they must believe in Jesus as the Son of God. And that's one reason why he adds the of God when he states it again in the second clause there. The second slight difference is that the words translated life are placed before the verb in the Greek.

[26:13] So the second half of the verb literally reads like this in the Greek. It says, the one not having the Son of God, life does not have.

Once again, that would be, the one not having the Son of God, life does not have. So this shift stresses the fact that those who reject God's Son also reject the life that comes along with that. They reject the life that the Father gives. Those people are without eternal life, and they are spiritually dead. John has once again stressed the importance then of believing in Jesus as the Son of God or the Messiah.

They are spiritually dead. They are spiritually dead. Eternal life is not possible apart from that belief. Once again, we see the words of Jesus ringing true. That's where he said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Life is only in Christ, so it's impossible to have life without him. If we reduce the death of Jesus to that of a mere man, we lose the cardinal point of a New Testament doctrine of the Atonement.

[27:30] And that is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. So when you look at the final analysis, the doctrine of the Atonement means that God himself bears our sins and shows that the final reality in the universe is God's sin bearing pardoning love.

But if Jesus is not the Son of God, his death can no longer bear that significance. So any theology which reduces talk of the incarnation to the status of a myth may be attractive to some modern men, but they take away our assurance that God's character is sin bearing love.

The teaching that John had for us tonight then is unmistakable. Eternal life is not found in education or philosophy or science or good works or even just religion or the church itself.

To have life, we must have the Son of God. On the other hand, people who do not have the Son of God do not have life. That is, they do not have true life.

And eternal life then is inseparable from Jesus Christ. Christian assurance is not a matter of working up a religious emotion. It's simply a matter of taking God at his word.

[28 : 51] We'll talk about that more next week as we cover the last nine verses of 1 John. For now, though, listen to how much the verses tonight reemphasize that John previously told us a similar thing in 1 John 2, 22 through 25.

In different words, 1 John 2, 22 through 25 gave us the same basic truth we saw tonight. John said, eternal life.