

February 21, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Do You Believe the Testimony?

1 John 5:6-12

- 1. The Testimony of the Water (verses 6-8)**
- 2. The Testimony of the Blood (verses 6-8)**
- 3. The Testimony of the Spirit (verses 6-8)**
- 4. The Testimony of God (verses 9-12)**

I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 John. Our text today is found in chapter 5 and verses 6-12. Let me read them for you now.

1 John 5:6-12

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. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne 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 has borne 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.

The key word in this text is the word, "testimony." It occurs eight times in a matter of seven verses. It's a courtroom word. It's used in determining the truth. A witness comes and stands before the court and solemnly promises to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The witness proceeds to sit down and give his (or her) "testimony." That is, they answer the questions of the lawyer.

They tell everything they know. And their testimony helps to establish the truth.

Well, this morning, in our text, we will hear the testimony of four witnesses. Each of them will come forth and sit on the stand and give their testimony. And you, the jury will hear the truth. And you, the jury, need to come to a decision. You will need to come to a decision about the truth.

Will you believe these witnesses? Or will you believe something else. Each of them will give testimony to Jesus. Each of them will plead that you believe them.

Let's look at the first three together.

- 1. The Testimony of the Water**
- 2. The Testimony of the Blood**
- 3. The Testimony of the Spirit**

These come together in verses 6-8.

1 John 5:6-8

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.

The water and the blood and the spirit are all mentioned in verse 6. And they are all included in verse 7 as those who testify.

1 John 5:7-8

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

In other words, we have three witnesses that come forth -- the water and the blood and the spirit. And each of these give their testimony. And they all agree on their testimony. You say, "Well, what is their testimony about?" It's all about Jesus. The water testifies about Jesus. The blood testifies about Jesus. The Spirit testifies about Jesus.

And they all are saying the same thing: "Jesus Christ came in the flesh. He is indeed the son of God. Believe in him!"

Let's think a bit about the first two, the water and the blood. There is great difficulty in understanding exactly what John means by these

words. Historically, there have been many suggestions. We will look at six explanations now.

Explanation 1: Some have seen a reference to baptism and the Lord's Supper. During baptism, water is used. During the Lord's supper, the blood of Christ is remembered.

Explanation 2: Others have seen a reference to the Old Testament sacrificial symbolism, with the water of purification, and with the blood of the sacrifice. Indeed, there was water cleansing in the Old Testament. And the sacrifices were bloody.

Explanation 3: Others have seen a reference to the purification and redemption that is found in Christ. The water represents purification. The blood represents redemption. Symbolically, this is true all throughout the Bible. Water is constantly used of purification.

Explanation 4: Others have connected these words to John 19:34, which tells of how, "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). This passage is the only other time in all of John's writings that these two elements of water and blood are combined.

Explanation 5: Others have seen a reference to the incarnation and death of Christ. The water referring to the birth of Jesus. The blood referring to the death of Jesus. Proof of this might come in Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6).

Explanation 6: Others have seen a reference to the baptism and death of Christ. The water referring to the baptism of Jesus. The blood referring to the death of Jesus. Proof of this might come at the account of the baptism of Jesus, when the voice of the Father rang out from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This is especially pertinent because the context of the passage indicates that a testimony is given by these things. And there is no stronger testimony than a voice coming from heaven for all to hear.

When it comes to determining which of these six interpretations is exactly right, to be honest with you, I'm not quite sure. However, I do have a bit of hesitancy regarding the first three interpretations that I gave you. Each of these take the water and the blood as symbolic of a greater reality. They view the water and the blood as equivalent to the Old Testament rituals, or as referring to baptism and the Lord's Supper, or as referring to cleansing and redemption in general.

While those symbols are true, and fully consistent with Biblical revelation, I just don't see anywhere in this letter that would give us a clue that such things were in John's mind as he wrote. He has been very straight-forward with about all that he has said. He has used very little symbolic language. And to think that the water and the blood are all of a sudden, some pictures of cleansing and redemption seems a bit far-fetched to me.

Furthermore, these interpretations don't much explain the connection with Jesus. John said that it is "he who came by water and blood." It seems as if these interpretations take the symbols of water and blood and run with them, without considering their connection to Jesus, who "came by water and blood."

But, the other three interpretations do. They spin around a similar theme of the life and death of Jesus. In fact, every one of these interpretations take the blood of Jesus as referring to his death. The only variance would be that the water refers either to his birth or his baptism or his death.

The thing that links them all together is that they refer to the reality of the incarnation of Christ. He really lived. He was flesh and bone. He was made up of water and blood.

Now, if you remember, the incarnation of Christ is an issue in this little letter. Look over at chapter 4 and verse 2. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God," (1 John 4:2).

When John was writing this letter, there were those who were denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. They were arguing that he was more of a spirit being that "seemed" to be human. The theological term for this belief is "Docetism." It comes from the Greek word for "seem" or "appear," (you might say it, "doceo"), from which we get the term, "Docetism," that is, Jesus only "appeared" to be in the flesh. But, in this epistle, John emphatically declares that this is incorrect. Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Chapter 4 and verse 2 is addressing this. Listen to it again in context.

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

And throughout chapter 4, we see a similar theme. God sent his Son to be with us.

1 John 4:9-10, 14

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

...

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

And I believe that this is what we are getting at in our text this morning. Jesus came in the flesh. He came by water. He came by blood. He came in the flesh. Now, whether the water refers to his birth, his baptism, or the water that flowed from his side at his death, I'm not really sure.

But, I do think that the water and the blood have reference to the reality of Jesus Christ, who came in the flesh. And this is the testimony that you need to hear this morning: Jesus Christ came to the earth. Jesus Christ walked the planet. He was real! Isn't this what John was getting at at the beginning of the letter?

1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John said, "We saw Jesus. We talked with Jesus. We touched Jesus. And we testify him to you. In him is eternal life. Believe in him and have the life." It's at this point where all of 1 John comes to a point of application. Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe in the testimony of the water and the blood? Do you believe in the Jesus who was born of the virgin Mary? Do you believe in the Jesus who was baptized by John in the Jordan? Do you believe in the Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate? Do you believe in the Jesus who was crucified, dead and buried? Do you believe in the Jesus who was risen from the dead?

That's the call of this text. It's a call to faith in the testimony. Do You Believe the Testimony? Do you believe in Jesus Christ come into the flesh to die for your sins! It's appropriate at this point to move on, ...

3. The Testimony of the Spirit (verses 6-8)

This isn't the testimony of the spirit of Jesus. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. On that last night that Jesus spent with the disciples on earth, he told them of how the Holy Spirit would come and testify to him. "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26). That's what John is talking about here in our text this morning. It is the testimony given by the Holy Spirit about Jesus.

Jesus said that the Spirit would come and "bear witness" about him. In other words, the Spirit would "testify" about Jesus. You say, "How is that done?" Jesus explained, ...

John 16:7-11

... I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Here it is. He sent the Spirit. And the Spirit will work in the hearts of those who don't know Jesus, to convict their hearts of sin. He will expose their wayward ways to their hearts. And they will see their need for justification. The Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of unbelievers to show them the way of righteousness. He will show them that there is such a thing as right and wrong. He will show them how they lack. And the Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of those in the world to show them that there is indeed a day of judgment. He will show them that there is a day coming when they will need to give an account of their lives before the Lord.

And as the Holy Spirit works this way in the hearts of people, they will either reject the convicting work of the Spirit. Or they accept the truth about themselves. And if they come to the Lord, seeking him with all of their heart, they will find the Lord. They will find Jesus who came "by water and blood." And they will find in him all of their spiritual needs fulfilled!

And the testimony of the Spirit will lead them to believe in the testimony of the water, and in the testimony of the blood. Look in verse 7, ...

1 John 5:7-8

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

The Testimony of the Spirit (verses 6-8), The Testimony of the Water (verses 6-8), and The Testimony of the Blood (verses 6-8) all work together to lead us to Jesus. And if you are here this morning and are not a believer in Jesus Christ, please know that you have gone against the clear testimony that God has given us concerning his son, Jesus Christ.

You cannot claim ignorance, because you have three that testify. In fact, in the law, the requirement was for two or three witnesses for any charge to be established. "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

This is the point that we have this morning. We have three witnesses: the Spirit and the water and the blood. And there is no disagreement among them all. They are all testifying to the true reality of Jesus Christ. And for you to walk out of here unbelieving isn't because of lack of evidence. It's because you have chosen to ignore the reality about Jesus Christ.

In fact, it is worse. You have chosen to ignore the testimony of God, himself. Let's look at our last point this morning.

4. The Testimony of God (verses 9-12)

This comes in verses 9-12.

1 John 5:9-12

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne 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 has borne 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.

And here's the wonderful gospel! "God gave us eternal life!" (verse 11). That is, life forever! Life that never ends.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun!
We've no less days
To sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun!

You say, how can I have that life? Life comes in the Son! (verse 11). It comes through faith in Jesus. It comes through receiving him and believing in him. As John 1:12 says, "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

It's through faith in Jesus Christ. It's not through working harder. It's not through being better. That's the point of verse 11, "God gave us eternal life." We didn't earn it. We didn't work for it. He gave it to us.

And there is no better news in the world! And if you don't believe this, you have not believed God. It's one thing to ignore the testimony of others.

I trust that you have had the experience of when someone tells you something that you simply don't believe. They say that something happened that you don't think happened. Or they say that some research has proven something that you really don't think is true. Or they are sure of some future event that you simply don't see happening.

In these instances, it's easy to ignore their testimony. When the student comes to the teacher and says, "My dog ate my homework," it's easy to dismiss as an unlikely excuse. When someone claims that a certain diet is the key to preventing cancer, it's easy to dismiss as a health fanatic. When someone says that they are sure that the underdog will win the big game, it's easy to dismiss as sentimentalism.

But, when we have the testimony of God, it's not so easy. It's because (as verse 9 says), "the testimony of God is greater." And if you don't believe in Jesus, then you have ignored the testimony of God. No, it's worse than ignoring the testimony of God. You have actually made the claim that God is a liar. Look again at verse 10,

1 John 5:10

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 has borne concerning his Son.

When you ignore the testimony of others, you often sugar-coat their statements. Now, many times, we can sugar-coat this by saying, "They mean well. It's just not true. They aren't trying to lie. They may think it's true. But it's not true." But, none of these sorts of things work with God. Because, he knows all things. And it is impossible for him to think that something is true, when, in fact, it is not true. And it is impossible for him to mean well and tell us what isn't true.

So, if you do not believe in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son, you have made God a liar. That's the reality of our text this morning. Believing (or not believing) in Jesus isn't really a matter of faith. Rather, it's a matter of truth.

I can do no better than D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who wrote, ...

Why should I believe on Jesus Christ? Well, if you have no other answer, God has told you that this is the Messiah. It is not merely the testimony of man, but the testimony of God, and over and above all other testimony our case rests on this fact—that this is a revelation from God. This is not a philosophy. This is not something that man thinks. It is not human imagination; It is not a myth. We claim that we have here a revelation from God, and the reason for believing this message is that it is the witness and testimony of God Himself.

This is a terrifying thought, and I wonder whether we realize it as we should. Not to believe the gospel and the Christian message is to say that God is a liar. Is there anyone uncertain about these things, anyone who talks about difficulties and says, "My mind is not fully satisfied"? If there is such a person I have great empathy with you. But I would remind you that this statement comes from God; God Himself is giving testimony and witness. God has said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). Am I to refuse Him? Well the terrifying thing is that if I do, I am saying

that God's pronouncement is not true. That is the position in which it involves us; for here we start on a different level. It is a revelation from God. It is the Almighty Himself who tells us this, and it is not a question of pitting our minds against a human teaching. It is a statement from Heaven, and to reject it is to say that God is a liar. ^[1]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 21, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, "Life in God: Studies in 1 John, volume 5", p. 86