
The Three Witnesses

“This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son” (1 John 5:6–9).

First John 5:5 is one of the greatest declarations about faith in Jesus in the entire New Testament. It asserts that the world can put in our way no obstacle which true faith in Jesus cannot overcome. This historic statement is pressed into one brief sentence: “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” John’s affirmation is eternal in its duration, overarching in its power, and practical in its application.

After this bold and sweeping description of faith, John took his readers into a kind of courtroom to present the telling evidence that proves Jesus is God’s Son and is worthy of such faith. His evidence for making such a remarkable case for the power of faith in Jesus was based upon three witnesses. He said, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement” (1 John 5:7, 8)). Let us listen quietly and reverently, with hearts that yearn to believe, as each witness testifies to us.

The first witness brought forward by John is water. John said, “This is the One who came by water . . . , Jesus Christ” (1 John 5:6a).

Admittedly, this passage is a difficult one, and different views of it have been given over the years. Augustine thought that this passage refers to the water and blood that flowed from Jesus’ side when it was pierced by the soldier’s spear. John Calvin and Martin Luther saw in it references to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Others have argued that the two words “water” and “blood” simply convey the ideas of purification through water and redemption through

Christ’s blood. However, the most reasonable view is that “water” alludes to the testimony given by Jesus’ baptism, while “blood” refers to the testimony given by His death.

What was John’s purpose in this passage? Was he not making specific and pointed references to the events in Jesus’ life that showed that He was indeed the Christ? As we consider the thrust of the passage—its context, intent, and argument—we are constrained to believe that John was evoking what had happened at Jesus’ baptism and death for the testimony that he was setting forth.

What, then, was the testimony of His baptism? The overall scene proclaimed Jesus’ deity. As Jesus came up from the water, the voice of the Father declared, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17b). Crowning it with further evidence, the Holy Spirit, as if it were a dove, descended upon Him. In this event, Jesus was baptized by John, the Father acknowledged Him from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; all three members of the Godhead were present on this occasion and participated in giving the testimony.

What exactly was its testimony? If we believe the Scriptures that relate the event to us, we must accept that Jesus is God’s Son. Who can deny such testimony?

However, there is more evidence. The second witness is the blood. John said, “This is the One who came by . . . blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood” (1 John 5:6a). In keeping with the most

reasonable interpretation of this passage, John submitted the evidence of His death. What does Jesus' death say about His character?

Through only a casual reading of the accounts of His death, we see numerous lines of evidence that prove His Sonship and deity. First, different aspects of His crucifixion were singled out by the writers of the Gospels and labeled as the fulfillment of prophecy. Such notations appear eight times during the accounts of the crucifixion. Further, we cannot help but notice the character of Jesus Himself. His perfect moral response when put to the extreme test puts Him in a class by Himself and constrains our moral judgment to say, "That is the way the Son of the God of love would act when persecuted." At the end of our Lord's life, as God gave clear and convincing testimony that His Son was the One who was dying, He shook the world with the darkness and the earthquake. Then He gave further proof with the opening of the graves and the resurrection of saints after Jesus rose from the dead.

At the cross, we see the highest type of proof of Jesus' deity. However, we should not be surprised by this fact. We are told throughout the accounts of our Lord's earthly life that He was God in the flesh; the Gospels lead us to expect that God would give undeniable evidence that this was His Son who was put on the cross. When we read the testimony, we can only accept it and believe in Jesus as God's Son—or else we must deny the credibility of the Scriptures.

The third witness is the Spirit. John said, "It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement" (1 John 5:6b-8).

The Spirit gave the divine record of what happened at the baptism and the cross. He chose to use these key events for the evidence that would be needed. He also guided—through His inspiration—those who wrote the testimony. Therefore, to deny the message of the baptism and the cross is to deny the credibility of the Spirit.

What, then, is the conclusion? What is the outcome of this trial? What will the jury decide? You—in fact, you alone—comprise the jury. In this case, there are no other jurors. You must listen to the evidence, evaluate it, and draw your own conclusion. No one can step into the jury box and decide for you. Further, you must work with only the evidence given to you by the Holy Spirit. You are two thousand years and perhaps thousands of miles away from the events, and you must rely upon the source—the holy Scriptures—that God has given. His record is the most reliable evidence that the world contains, but you must process it and render a verdict concerning it. Your decision will result in your eternal life or eternal death.

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God has given us the complete evidence that we need in order to believe. Anyone who wants to believe can believe. If we have the ability to listen to the testimony of men and deduce from it what is true, then how much more should we be able to accept the higher and more reliable testimony of God and believe? John said, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son" (1 John 5:9).