

# The Witness of God

*1 John 5:6-13*

*With Study Questions*

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## **Preface: A Kangaroo Court**

Most of us are familiar with the kangaroo court recorded in the eighth chapter of John. Jesus was teaching in the temple when the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. Recognizing that Jesus was constrained to obey the law of Moses (which called for stoning) they were putting Jesus in, what appeared to be, a rock and hard place in order that they might accuse Him and demonstrate a flaw in His message or character. Would this preacher of forgiveness, and friend of publicans and sinners, have the woman stoned? Or would He violate the law of Moses?

The answer is, of course, neither. For a person to be stoned required the testimony of two or three witnesses (Dt. 17:6) and Jesus (through writing in the sand and asking for the sinless person to cast the first stone) systemically eliminated all the witnesses.

Why do I bring this up as we proceed to examine 1 John 5:6-13? I bring this up because the ensuing dialogue of John 8 is often omitted when the story is presented. We have the dramatic conclusion where Jesus is alone with the woman and proclaims her deliverance from condemnation and exhorts her to sin no more. But in verse twelve Jesus speaks to them (the Pharisees and scribes) again. And the remainder of their conversation is very germane to the text before us. We will address that in a moment. But first let us observe verse six.

## **Water and Blood**

**“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” (1 John 5:6).**

There is great difficulty in understanding the meaning of the beginning of verse six. The water and blood have been interpreted a number of ways. Some have thought it to be baptism and communion; birth and death; the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side at His crucifixion; a reference to the ancient rites of the old covenant; the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus, etc. At this point I am not going to press any one understanding because, for the most part, they are quite similar. Whether it is a reference to the old covenant rituals<sup>1</sup> or Jesus' baptism and His death<sup>2</sup>, or even water baptism and communion in general, they still illustrate the same truth, the cleansing and atoning blood of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries XXII* (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Clark, *First John* (The Trinity Foundation, 1980), p. 155.

## **Not Water Only**

Perhaps John says, “not by water only, but by water and blood” as a response to those who were denying the actual physical suffering and sacrifice of Christ. Whatever might be the case, John is referring to the person and work of Jesus. And it is what follows that seems to be John’s main point.

### **I. The Witness of Men**

In verses six through eleven John will use the word “witness” ten times. It is the most prominent word in the passage (if not the entire chapter) and therefore deserves our focus. It may be of interest to note that the word ‘witness’ is the word from which we get our English word ‘martyr’. It has been said that,

**“Those who in the face of danger and distress testify to the truth of God are witnesses in the highest sense (Heb. x., xi., xii. 1). Martyr is a Greek word meaning witness, and it came to signify one who sealed his testimony with his blood, as Stephen and Antipas (Acts xxii. 20; Rev. ii. 13).”<sup>3</sup>**

### **How Many Witnesses?**

John is writing of the person and work of Jesus. The question is, “How is it we know of Jesus?” How do you know that your faith (this faith that has overcome the world) is true? We witness to others in hopes that they might be saved. But with so much at stake, do we really expect other people to rest their eternal souls upon our testimony? How many expert witnesses must the court parade through the witness stand before the jurors can be sure of their verdict?

Please allow me to remove what I have found to be poor, perhaps unbiblical, and at very least dubious witnesses. Then, let’s see if we can understand what John indicates to be the true witness. I will call these questionable things, ‘the witness of men’ from verse nine.

### **Changed Life**

I was told years ago by a fellow in ministry that the greatest testimony to the reality of Jesus was a changed life. The fact that millions of people have experienced changed lives is sure evidence that Jesus is the Savior. Of course, a huge problem with this is the fact that many people have had changed lives as a result of other religions, positive thinking type seminars, alcoholics anonymous,

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<sup>3</sup> John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Westminster Press, 1942), p. 821).

etc. So where a changed life might be a good thing is certainly is no iron clad evidence of the claims of Christ.

### **Witness in Myself**

Another witness that is quite popular in churches is, what you might call, the witness in myself. This is probably never more clearly conveyed in the very romantic, often sung, semi-modern gospel-hymn, which climaxes with the verse, “you ask me how I know He lives—He lives within my heart.” Quite frankly, there is really know telling what anyone means by that. He is obviously not physically in your heart. And if He is spiritually in your heart, how does your mind know that it is the Spirit of Jesus in your heart and not perhaps a false sense of comfort? We must keep in mind that when the Hebrew language uses the word heart, it is really referring to the mind. When Psalm 14:1 indicates that the fool has said in his heart, there is no God, we must realize that the heart doesn’t actually say anything, nor does it think. It beats.

### **Evidence**

Another witness which extols the ingenuity and self-congratulatory nature of post-renaissance, and post industrial-revolution man, is the notion that history, science, literature, etc. provide irrefutable evidence for the truth of the claims of Christ. Authors, whom I have otherwise enjoyed, make the claim that they started out to disprove the Christian faith and essentially proved it to be true. I have no doubt that any legitimate microscope we would use to scrutinize the claims of Christ would pronounce Him legitimate. I have great doubts, however, regarding the legitimacy of our microscopes.

## **II. The Witness of God**

**“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. <sup>8</sup> And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. <sup>9</sup> 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” (1 John 5:7-9).**

### **The Witnesses of God**

How does John address the issue? John has already pointed out in verse six that it is the Spirit that bears witness and here he builds on that idea. Here we see, in a sense, God adhering to His own law. The Father, Word and Spirit bearing witness in heaven is a questionable text and not absolutely necessary to

the point. But there is a witness on earth as well. The water and the blood, which we have already discussed and the Spirit.

This should remind us of Romans 8:16 **“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”** Or Galatians 4:6 **“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”** Or as we see it aptly put in the Westminster Confession I, 5.

**We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.**

### **The Triune Testimony**

According to John and Paul, the testimony of men has little to do with genuine faith. It is the Spirit who bears witness with our spirit. And how does this work? The person and work of Jesus, as proclaimed by the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20) is preached and by the power of the Spirit, is believed. And if we put this all together we see the work of the Trinity. Let’s go back to Jesus’ encounter with the Pharisees.

**Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” 13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.” 14 Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. 15 “You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 “And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. 17 “It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. 18 “I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” 19 Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” 20**

**These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come (John 8:12-20).**

After quickly dispensing of their pathetic little display of false justice, Jesus puts them on trial. His own testimony would be enough. But Jesus, the keeper of the law, appeals to the testimony of the Father as well. The rejection of Jesus demonstrated that they didn't know the Father either.

### **III. Rejecting the Witness**

But now John approaches this from a negative point of view. He writes,

**“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” (1 John 5:10).**

There is no middle ground here. People who reject Jesus make God out to be a liar. Let's make no bones about it. People who reject Jesus are not lacking in evidence. They have the testimony of God Himself. It is as if God took the witness stand and, with no doubt, proclaimed the fact of the matter. The jury now will either believe, or reject what they know to be true. The natural man may delude himself with all sorts of fantasies about requiring greater evidence. But he forgets who is on trial. And perhaps he forgets what hangs in the balance.

**“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to believe in the name of the Son of God*” (1 John 5:11-13).**

What hangs in the balance is eternal life. If one has the Son, he has life. To reject Jesus is the most blatant demonstration of a person who is in darkness until now.

But John's main concern is for his spiritual children. Here we see John's intended audience are not those who will reject truth and life but those who believe in the name of the Son of God. And John seems to have two reasons: 1) He wants Christians to have assurance. We are to know that we have eternal life. If God has testified to you of the truth of Christ, it is a sure witness and you can know that your soul is safe. 2) John desires that his spiritual children continue to persevere in their faith. Something I am sure he was confident would take place.

## Questions for Study

1. How is it Jesus could rightly acquit the woman caught in adultery?
2. What are some possible understandings of water and blood?
3. Why do you suppose John said, “Not by water only, but by water and blood?”
4. What does the word witness mean in English?
5. What are some examples of the witness of men?
6. Why is the witness of men questionable at best?
7. What is the witness of God?
8. Who gives witness of Jesus?
9. Can you explain how the witness of God works?
10. When someone rejects Jesus, what is he saying about God?
11. What seems to be John’s main goal as demonstrated by verse 13?