

The Reliable Witness that Supports the Christian Faith

1 John 5:1-12

1 John 5:1-12 - *“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. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶ 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. ⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.*

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Background Notes

You probably noticed that verse 7 in the translation I just read (New King James Version) is significantly different from the translations some of you are reading. Verse 7 is sometimes called the “Trinity verse”: *“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”* However, that verse is omitted in many translations, so many of you don’t have that verse.

Why not? Most likely, the verse 7 that is included in the King James and the New King James versions is not part of the inspired text. It’s not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts - it’s only included in a few very late Greek manuscripts. (Manuscripts of Scripture, by the way, are handwritten copies of the Biblical writings. The manuscripts were copied with great care before the printing press was invented.)

So what about this? We’ll know for sure whether this verse is part of the Bible or not when we get to Heaven. I wish this verse truly were part of the inspired Word, because it would be an excellent proof text for the Trinity. It would be especially helpful when dealing with cults like the Jehovah Witnesses. But because the weight of the manuscript evidence does not support this verse as having been part of the original text, I would suggest that you do not use this verse as a

proof text for the Trinity. The Bible clearly teaches the Trinity in many other places, and we don't need to use this verse for proof.

Verses 1-3 conclude the subject of the love of God from chapter 4 – both God's love for us and our love for Him. We could call verses 1-3 the "cycle of love." If we're born of God, we will love God. And if we love God, we will keep His commandments. And if we keep His commandments, we will love our fellow believers. And if we love our fellow believers, it is evidence that we love God and are born of God.

At the end of verse 3 we read, *"And His commandments are not burdensome."* Notice that it doesn't say that the Lord's commands are easy – it says the Lord's commands are not "burdensome." For example, a command to a mother to love her baby would not be a burdensome command, even though caring for an infant isn't easy – it's a lot of work!

The apostle John's subject moves from Christian love to Christian faith in verses 4-12.

Doctrinal Point

Christian faith is the essential characteristic of Christian fellowship.

a. Christian faith is the means to overcome the world.

Verses 4-5: *"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?"*

The Christian has a three-fold enemy: the world, the flesh, and the devil. In spiritual warfare, when we're confronted with this three-fold enemy, we flee, we fight, and we walk by faith. We flee the flesh (2 Timothy 2:22), we stand and fight the devil (Ephesians 6:10-17), and we walk by faith to overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5).

By "faith" here, we don't mean psyching yourself up with faith in yourself, or having faith in faith. Verse 5 defines the faith we're talking about. It's faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. As we walk by faith in Him, we overcome the world.

1 John 2:17 is a good illustration. If you really believe 1 John 2:17, you will overcome the world. *"And the world is passing away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever."* Do you really believe that truth that the world and our strong desires for worldly things are only temporary – that the world is passing away? Do you have faith that it's a true statement? If you do, materialism will never be a problem for you.

However, if you're trusting in this world for your security, and if you strongly desire and even love your earthly possessions, then you are not living by faith - and you will not overcome this world. Christian faith is the means to overcome the world.

b. Christian faith has a sufficient witness.

The Christian faith is not a blind leap of faith. It is a reasonable step, because the Christian faith has a reliable and sufficient evidence and witness backing it up. In these verses, we have the external witness and the internal witness – the witness that Jesus is the Son of God who became Man, and that Jesus is God's only way of salvation. The external witness is in verses 6-9, and the internal witness is in verse 10.

- The external witness is historical, it is objective, and it is three-fold.

Verse 8: *"There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one."* At our Lord's baptism, the Holy Spirit was seen descending as a dove upon the Lord Jesus and the voice of God was heard from Heaven: *"This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,"* Matthew 3:16-17.

Furthermore, the Spirit witnessed through the Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the incarnate Son of God. Besides the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures, most of the New Testament was already written by this time.

What about the witness of the water and the blood (v6)? *"This is He who came by water and blood -- Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood."* There are several interpretations for the witness of the "water" and the "blood." One interpretation says this refers to the water and blood that flowed from our Lord's side at His death (John 19). Another interpretation is that it speaks of the "water" and the blood that are present at natural birth, emphasizing that our Lord was truly Man as well as God.

I believe the best interpretation would be the one that best fits the historical context of 1 John. The best interpretation would be the one that refutes the false teaching of Gnosticism, because that was the heresy the apostle was refuting all the way through 1 John. Remember, these false teachers were saying that Jesus was not God, but was only a man. They taught that at His baptism, the "Christ-spirit" (which was not truly God but only an "emanation from God") came upon the man Jesus. They taught that this "Christ-spirit" left the man Jesus before he died. According to this false and incorrect view, that is why Jesus cried out from the cross, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* The Gnostics believed that the Christ-spirit departed from the man Jesus before death.

With verse 6, John was refuting the wrong thinking and wrong teaching of Gnosticism. The "water," then, would refer to our Lord's baptism, which began His public ministry, and "blood" would refer to the cross, which concluded His work here on this earth. However, it is possible that the term "water" here may refer to physical birth, as our Lord seemed to use that term "water" when He spoke of birth to Nicodemus in John 3:5: *"Most assuredly, I say to*

you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” One interpretation of that Scripture is that the Lord was saying: “Nicodemus, you need more than physical birth; you must have spiritual birth.”

In either case, it’s hard to miss John’s point! Jesus was the Son of God incarnate – not an ordinary man upon whom an emanation from God had come. Jesus Christ was fully God and fully Man throughout His life. He was fully God and fully Man when He was baptized and also when he went to the cross. He was 100% God and 100% Man - not just during His life, but when He died as well.

The three-fold external witness of God to the Son is a great witness: *“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”* (v9).

- The internal witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is God incarnate is subjective and experiential.

“He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself” (v10). This internal witness is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convinces our conscience, and He empowers and enables the new life within us. So faith has a sufficient witness.

Practical Application

Whether you like it or not, there is only “one Road up the mountain.”

Many people today believe that there are “many paths that lead up the mountain” to Heaven and to eternal life, and that the Christian faith is only one of many paths to God. However, according to the Bible, there is **only one** “Road” up the mountain. *“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 of God does not have life”* (v11-12).

If you show these verses to people who say that there’s more than one road up the mountain, or more than one way to Heaven, chances are they’ll say, “That’s not fair!” They don’t like God’s One Way of salvation, through Jesus Christ alone - because it’s “unfair.” Well, in the end, what people think is fair or what they would like is not what matters. The only thing that matters is what is **true** - what **God** has said!

This Scripture says that God has given us a reliable testimony of His Son, and a reliable testimony of the way of salvation. If a person says that Jesus Christ is not the One Way to God, or that He’s only one of many ways, that person is **calling God a liar!** *“He who does not believe God has made Him a liar”* (v10).

In John 14 Jesus said, *“I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.”* So - whether you like it or not, there is **only one** “Road” up the mountain.