

Six Superlative Witnesses That Jesus is the Son of God

1 John 5:6-12

Introduction: 1) Bertrand Russell lived from 1872-1970. He was a well known atheistic philosopher in the 20th century. He authored more than 100 books, wrote a 3-volume autobiography and was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1950. One of his most well known books was *Why I Am Not A Christian* (1927). In it he argued that all organized religions are the residue of the barbaric past that dwindle to mere hypocritical superstitions and have no basis in reality. On one occasion Russell was asked what he would say to God if he found himself standing before God. His answer: **“I should reproach Him for not giving us enough evidence.”**

2) The apostle John would disagree with Russell when it comes to the issue of not enough evidence. As an eyewitness of the life, passion and resurrection of Jesus, the last living apostle would testify that there is abundant and overwhelming evidence that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore God exists. The problem is not with the evidence. The problem is with the sinful and unbelieving heart. Charles Spurgeon says it well,

“Christianity puts forth very lofty claims. She claims to be the true faith, and the only true one. She avows her teachings to be divine, and therefore infallible; while for her great Teacher, the Son of God, she demands divine worship, and the unreserved confidence and obedience of men. Her

commands are issued to every creature, and though at present her authority is rejected by millions of mankind, she confidently looks forward to a time when truth shall obtain universal dominion, and Jesus the Lord shall take unto himself his great power and reign.

Now, to justify such high claims, the gospel ought to produce strong evidence, and it does so. It does not lack for external evidences, these are abundant..." ("The Three Witnesses," *MTP*, Aug. 9, 1874, p.445).

3) In these verses a courtroom setting is easily imagined. Some form of the Greek word *martus*, translated "testify", "testimony", or "borne" occurs no less than 10 times. John places in the dock 6 witnesses who will testify to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who gives the gift of eternal life to all who trust in Him. These 6 witnesses have different but complementary perspectives. And, their witness is comprehensive, building a powerful case. John makes his argument by drawing attention to the career of Jesus from His baptism to His crucifixion. He invites the other persons of the Triune God to give their witness. He even extends an invitation to those of us who have been converted through faith in Jesus (5:5) to tell our story as well. Open minded, free thinking people should, at the least, examine the evidence. They may be surprised just how strong the evidence is for the verdict that Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:14, 18).

I. We have the witness of His baptism 5:6-8

- 1) The first witness that John calls to the stand is the witness of Jesus' baptism.

The word water occurs four times in verses 6-8. Some see this as a reference to the water of physical birth, the water that flowed from our Lord's side when he was pierced on the cross (John 19:34-35) or even the two sacraments or ordinances of baptism (water) and the Lord's Supper (blood). This later perspective was held by both Martin Luther and John Calvin.

- 2) However, the historical context of refuting the false teachings of Cerenthus, who said the Christ spirit descended on the man Jesus at His baptism but abandoned Him on the cross, points strongly in the direction that John had the baptism of Jesus in mind.

- 3) The baptism of Jesus is so important it is found in all four gospels (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Like 3:21-23; John 1:29-34). Here the Triune God is revealed and Jesus is anointed for His public ministry. Matthew 3:16-17 records it this way, "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." The Father's declaration combines words from Psalm 2:7, a Messianic Psalm, with Isaiah 42:1, the first of the Servant Songs. Jesus is

indeed the anointed Son who will be a King. However, He will be a suffering King, a Servant King. This is the witness of His Father at His baptism.

- 4) Some have pointed out that being sinless, Jesus had no need of being baptized. He does not belong there. And, that is true. He no more belongs at a baptism for repentance than He does on a cross for sinners. In both events He identifies Himself with sinners He came to save. Our Lord's baptism says look at the Holy Spirit of God descending upon Him and anointing Him. It says listen to the voice of the Father and His announcement concerning Him. Jesus was not a mere man. He is the Son of God who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World (John 1:29).

II. We have the witness of His crucifixion 5:6-8

1) The second witness that the apostle calls to the stand is the crucifixion of Christ. This is represented by the word "blood" which occurs 3 times in verses 6-8. The work of our Savior was initiated at His baptism and it was finished by His bloody death on the cross. Jesus, Himself, said from the cross in John 19:30, "It is finished" and then "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

2) When Jesus Christ died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, His Father again provided significant witnesses to the event.

- There was darkness across the land from the 6th to the 9th hour (noon until 3pm; Matt. 27:51).
- “The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51).
- There was an earthquake (Matt 27:51).
- A number of Old Testament saints were raised and appeared to many as the first fruits of resurrection life for all who trust in Jesus (Matt. 27:52-53).

These events led a hardened Roman Centurion to exclaim, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39). Jesus of Nazareth was not God’s special agent adopted at His baptism but abandoned the cross. He was and is the eternal Son of God who entered this world in time and space and died as our propitiation (1 John 2:2; 4:10). His death was not an accident. It was not an act of martyrdom. It was a divine, saving substitution for sinners with redeeming value and worth.

3) Though modern persons might articulate their rejection of Christ and His atoning death on the cross differently than those in the 1st century, the bottom-line is the same. They say that Jesus of Nazareth suffering a brutal

bloody death has no redemptive value and bears no significance for my salvation. Delores Williams represents this perspective well when she says, “There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross” (*Sisters in the Wilderness*, p.61). Others will even charge that the biblical portrayal of our Lord’s death is better viewed as “divine child abuse” (Steve Chalke, *The Last Message of Jesus*). And still others believe we pursue a wiser course of theological discourse by offering to modern persons what David Powlison calls “The Therapeutic Gospel”, a gospel that gives people what they want and promotes their welfare and temporal happiness. As Powlison says, “It does not want the King of Heaven to come down. It does not attempt to change people into lovers of God, given the truth of who Jesus is, what he is like, what he does.” (*IX Marks News*, July/Aug 2007, 4.5, p.5).

The cross says the King of Heaven has come down, and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:21). This is the true and biblical witness of our Lord’s crucifixion. Praise His Name, He did come to die for us and He did come to change us!

III. We have the witness of the Holy Spirit 5:6-8

1) The third witness invited to testify to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God is the Holy Spirit of God. He is referenced 3 times in verses 6-8. In verse 6 the Bible says the Spirit provides a consistent and continuous witness that

Jesus is the Christ and that He does so because “the Spirit is the truth.”

Jesus said the exact same thing about the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, “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.”

2) John MacArthur points out,

“The Father also testified to the Son through the ministry **of the Spirit**, who **is the truth** (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth in that He is true and, therefore, the source and revealer of divine truth (1 Peter 1:12; cf. Acts 1:16; 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15-17), particularly about Jesus Christ (John 15:26). The Spirit was involved at Jesus’ conception (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), baptism (Matt. 3:16), temptation (Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1), and throughout His ministry. Peter said to those gathered in Cornelius’s house, “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38; cf. Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:14; John 3:34). Because the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus for ministry, to attribute Christ’s miraculous works to Satan was to blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Mark

3:28-30). Jesus always did the will of the Father in the power of the Spirit.” (1-3 John, p. 195).

3) The three-fold witness of the water (baptism), blood (cross) and Spirit agree (v. 8). This reflects the Old Testament expectation in Deuteronomy 19:15 where the Bible says, “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 evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.” In verse 8 the Spirit is mentioned first because it is He who testifies to us through the water and the blood. All three are in agreement: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

4) Pastor James Merritt addresses well the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He testifies to the Son, “The witness of the Spirit is God’s witness to us, in us, and through us. Just as the arrow of a compass always points towards the North, the Spirit of God always points to Jesus” (“Do You Know For Sure”, unpublished sermon notes).

5) Jesus again said of the Holy Spirit in John 16:14, “He will glorify me.”

IV. We have the witness of the Father 5:9-10

1) John continues his parade of witnesses calling to the stand at this point the strongest witness of all: God the Father. The “testimony” of the Father resounds again and again in verses 9-10 as the apostle employs what we call

a “lesser to greater” argument. In the everyday affairs of life “we receive (accept) the testimony (witness) of men.” In the Jewish context as we have noted (Deut. 17:6; 19:15), the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses was required and sufficient to confirm something as true. If that is so, how much should we believe God Himself, especially when He has just supplied His own three-fold witness of the Spirit, water and blood (v. 8)? The testimony of God is indeed greater; superior in source, status and significance to the testimony of any human persons. It is more reliable and trustworthy because it comes from the God who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18).

2) The testimony given by God is a testimony “He has borne (“testified to”) concerning his Son” (v. 9). I think John is saying the abiding testimony of Jesus’ baptism, His crucifixion, and that of the Holy Spirit is God’s historical witness that Jesus is His Son. Never did God give such a witness to anyone else in all of history. The Father’s witness to His Son is singular and unique.

3) The Father’s witness to Jesus demands a response from each and every one of us. Neutrality and indecision is not an option. In fact to not believe that Jesus is the Son of God is to not believe God and to make him “a liar, because [you] have not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son” (v.10). John says believing in Jesus as the Son of God

is equivalent to accepting God the Father's testimony about His Son. To reject Jesus as God's Son is equivalent to calling God a liar. It is that simple and John is that straightforward. Again, Spurgeon is our helper,

“God is to be believed if all men contradict him. “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” One word of God ought to sweep away ten thousand words of men, whether they be philosophers of today or sages of antiquity. God's word is against them all, for he knows infallibly. Of his own Son he knows as none else can; of our condition before him he knows; of the way to pardon us he knows. There is nothing in God that could lead him to err or make mistake, and it were blasphemy to suppose that he would mislead us. It were an insult to him, such as we may not venture to perpetrate for a moment, to suppose that he would willfully mislead his poor creatures by a proclamation of mercy which meant nothing , or by presenting to them a Christ who could not redeem them. The gospel with God for its witness cannot be false. Whatever may be the witness against it, the witness of God is greater! We must believe the witness of God.” (“Faith, and the Witness Upon Which it is Founded,” *MTP*, n.d., p.41).

4) Jesus said in John 5:37, “The Father who sent me has borne witness about me.” I believe the words of Jesus. I believe the witness of the Father.

V. We have the witness of our conversion

5:10

1) John now does a very interesting and strategic thing. He ties together and unites our outward confession of Jesus as the Son of God to the inner witness we now have within ourselves. What we confess with our mouth God makes real in our hearts.

2) Paul said this as well in Romans 10:9-10, “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” And in Romans 8:16 he adds, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

3) The inward and internal witness of God’s Spirit in our heart confirms to the child of God that you were right to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who alone gives the gift of eternal life (vs.11-12). This internal testimony or witness is the personal presence of God in us and it beautifully balances and complements the external and historical witness of the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus, all witnessed by the Holy Spirit. Plummer well says,

“the external witness faithfully accepted becomes internal certitude”

(Epistles of John, 117).

4) In the context of pastoral theology and practical application this verse is of great value. John does not point us back to a prior experience. He leads us to look now, today, to a present testimony and witness. Who am I trusting today? Who am I believing in today? Where is my hope and confidence today? Is it Christ? Then rest in the assurance you have the Son and His gift of eternal life. Not knowing the exact moment you were converted does not mean you are not saved. A past experience can be helpful, but it is present-day testimony that provides the confirmation and assurance God wants you to enjoy and your soul longs to have. “I am believing in Christ and only in Christ.” You will find that to be a blessed avenue of assurance that will cause you to proclaim with passion and conviction, “Jesus is the Son of God.”

VI. We have the witness of eternal life 5:11-12

1) John calls his final witness to the stand to testify to the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is a fascinating witness. It is the witness of “eternal life.” The connection between having the Son and having life is so essential John will mention “the Son” 7 times in verses 9-13 and “life” 5 times in verses 11-13.

2) Eternal Life is a God quality, a God kind of life. It has a particular character or essence as well as a never ending duration. Having Jesus, the Son of God, equals having eternal life. This is God's testimony. This is God's gift ("God gave us eternal life", v.11). This life is in His Son and again it is found in no one else (John 14:6).

3) In fact to have the Son is to have life. To not have the Son of God means you do not have life. Having the Son of God equals life. Not having the Son of God equals death. You are a walking, talking dead man. You are a spiritual corpse in a physical body.

4) James Boice notes,

"John's reference to "eternal life" as the essence of salvation carries us back to the opening verses of the letter, in which he wrote that this life was revealed in Jesus, who is Himself the life. Eternal life is not merely unending life, therefore. It is the very life of God. What we are promised in Christ is a participation in the life of the One who bears this testimony. This life is not to be enjoyed by everyone, however. This life is in Christ. Consequently, it is as impossible to have life without having Christ as it is impossible to have Christ without at the same time possessing eternal life." (*The Epistles of John*, 166).

5) The Bible teaches that you do not have to hope you have eternal life or even think you have eternal life. It says you can know you have eternal life when you know you have the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as your Savior. This witness, this gift of eternal life, witnesses to the eternal Son, for only what is eternal can give you what is eternal.

Conclusion: 1) I began this study with a quote from my hero from the past Charles Spurgeon. Let me end with one as well. Just what is at stake in all of this? If our six superlative witnesses have testified to the truth then what does all of this mean for you, for me, for the world? Here it is in sum:

“Let me, first of all, say a word or two about the way in which we are saved, the *modus operandi* of salvation, as we find it described in the Scriptures. Here it is in a nutshell. We have all broken God’s law and we are justly condemned on account of it. God in infinite mercy desiring to save the sons of men has given his Son Jesus to stand in the room, place, and stead of as many as believe in him. Jesus became the substitute of his people, and suffered in their stead, and for them the debt of punishment due to God was paid by Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. All who believe in him are thereby cleared before the bar of divine justice. Now, the Lord having given his Son has revealed this great fact in his Word. Here it is in this inspired book—the full statement of it—to this effect, that

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ hath everlasting life. This is God's testimony...and all we have to do in order to realize the result of Christ's passion is simply to believe the testimony of God concerning it, and rest upon it. The argument runs thus: Christ saveth those who trust him; I trust him, and therefore I am saved. Jesus Christ suffered for the sins of his people; his people are known by their believing in him; I believe in him, and therefore he died for my sins, and my sins are blotted out. This is the summary of the transaction. God's testimony concerning his Son is at first believed, simply because God says so, and for no other reason; and then there grows up in the soul other evidence not necessary to faith, but very strengthening to it,—evidence which springs up in the soul as the result of faith, and is the witness referred to in our text—"He that believeth hath the witness in himself." ("The Priest Dispensed With", *MTP*, Aug 15, 1875, p.471).

2) So I ask, do you believe the testimony of these six superlative witnesses? Do you have this testimony in yourself? "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."