

Testimonies to Jesus' humanity and divinity 29/3/20 dkm

Read: John 5:24-47, 1John 5

Text: 1John 5:6-12

Psalms: 115:10-18, 19:7-13, 121, 134a

John probably wrote his gospel around 85AD and his letters shortly afterwards- by which time he would have been close to 90yrs old. When he wrote this letter false teachers were appearing in the church at Ephesus and elsewhere. These would have been second generation Christians who had not seen Jesus, as John had. John testifies as to what he saw at the beginning of this letter. But despite his testimony these false teachers did not believe that Jesus was fully human, that he was the Son of God come in the flesh (4:2). They did not hold to the truth of the incarnation. One false teacher called Cerinthus, taught that the divine Christ came upon the man Jesus at his baptism and left him before he was crucified.

When Jesus was ministering in this world no one denied his humanity but many questioned his claim to be the Son of God. John heard Pharisees saying to Jesus: 'You bear witness of yourself; your witness is not valid' (John 8:13NIV). Jesus had earlier spoken of four witnesses declaring the truth about him: John the Baptist, his works, the Father himself, and the Scriptures (John 5:31-40). Under Jewish law two or three witnesses were required (Deut 19:15), and self-witness was not one of these. John was not just dealing with Jews here in this letter; he was actually dealing with men claiming to be Christians. And he was dealing with denial of the humanity of Jesus more than denial of his divinity. But he follows the principle of establishing the truth by multiple witnesses, as he learned it from Jesus. 'Three that testify' is our first subheading; 'Testimony of God' and 'Testimony of the heart' are our subsequent subheadings.

1. Three that testify

'Who is he that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God' (5:5). We read and rejoiced in these words when looking at the previous verses in 1John 5. 'Belief' is the same

word as 'faith' in Greek. Faith in Jesus is the gift of God, a gift that brings blessings of love, peace, hope and victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. But what is the basis of this faith? Many see faith as a 'leap in the dark', as something that does not pass the test of reason or science. John disagrees.

John sets before you and the world ample evidence regarding the historical person of Jesus, the one who is the object of our faith. He sets before us evidence regarding the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. If the Jesus we believe in does not have two natures; if Jesus was not God and without sin, and was not a man who could represent us, then our faith is futile. John was contending with false teachers in the church, men who questioned the full humanity of Jesus, as well as those who questioned his full divinity.

John takes these questions to court, as it were, and brings witnesses or testimony to support his teaching; both 'witness' and 'testimony' translate the one Greek word '*martureo*'. He initially cites three witnesses, the Spirit, the water and the blood (5:7, 8). He begins by declaring that Jesus Christ 'came by water and blood', and then adds the witness of the Spirit of truth (5:6). What does John mean by 'water and blood'? This question has challenged scholars almost since the time John wrote. I say 'almost' because his first readers would have understood what he meant. Nothing in the Bible is designed to confuse us; it is just that with the passage of time we are no longer familiar with the original setting of this letter. We do our best to understand this setting; we know of the Gnostic heresy and the heretic called Cerinthus.

The words 'water and blood' are familiar to us from the crucifixion of Jesus, as recorded in John's gospel. Seeing that Jesus was already dead, the soldiers did not break his legs, but John saw one of them thrust a spear in his side and 'blood and water came out' (John 19:34). John saw this as the fulfilment of Scripture: 'They shall look on Him whom they pierced'. Augustine thought John was referring to

this incident here in this letter, but the actual wording is different: here in this letter water and blood did not come out of Jesus, but 'he came by water and blood' (5:6). The Reformers thought John was referring to the two sacraments as the witnesses to water and blood, but John makes no mention of the sacraments.

Keeping in mind the context, and indeed the third element of this three-fold witness, namely the Holy Spirit, we see the reference to water and blood being to the baptism and death of Jesus respectively. John's reference to Jesus' baptism is brief but he records the witness of John the Baptist: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and He remained on Him', and 'I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God' (John 1:32, 34). He did not see Jesus become the Son of God but the witness of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God. Cerinthus was saying that Jesus the man became the Christ or became divine at this point, thereby denying the incarnation.

Equally serious in terms of our salvation was this heretic's claim that the Spirit departed before Jesus died. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples, including John, that he must be crucified and rise again on the third day. His death was not that of a good but sinful man, as concluded in the theology of these heretics. His death was that of a flesh and blood man who was 'yet without sin' because he was born of a virgin. The sin for which he suffered and died was our imputed sin. This is the witness of the Spirit of truth or the Holy Spirit, witness at the baptism and at the death of Jesus. These three witnesses, John assures us, agree, thus fulfilling the requirements of the law for two or three witnesses. You may recall that the witnesses brought to testify against Jesus at his earthly trial did not agree.

Before going on I need to explain a difference you may have noticed in the various translations of verses 7-8. Our NKJV refers to another three witnesses, namely the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit (5:7). But these words are not found in any Greek MSS prior to the

sixteenth century- 'they contain great truth, but they are not original'. They first entered the Latin text and passed into the Vulgate. Erasmus was convinced to include them in his Greek text because of the Vulgate, and because of this reference in a very late Greek MSS. For this reason, we are reading verses 7- 8 as: 'For there are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and these three agree'.

2. Testimony of God

The law placed qualifications on the character of witnesses, as well as the number required. Thieves, violent men, and shepherds were not accepted as witnesses. The Pharisees rejected the testimony of tax-collectors and sinners. But they accepted the witness of men like themselves. We accept the word of other people all the time, especially when we accept credit payments or contracts. On this basis John asks why we don't accept the testimony of God. In terms of character, the witness of God is much greater than that of any man. The sovereign God has no occasion to lie, and indeed cannot lie.

Jesus similarly bears true witness, and his judgment is true, but he did not rely on this as he defended himself against the Pharisees (John 9:14, 16). Jesus pointed them to the witness of God his Father: 'The Father who sent me bears witness of me' (John 9:18, 5:37). Where do we find the witness of God? John, like Peter, testified to hearing the voice of God on the Mount of Transfiguration. God spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism. He spoke through the darkness and other supernatural events at the death of Jesus, not to mention at the resurrection. God's testimony to Jesus Christ as his Son is indeed great (5:9). It is written in the prophets and it is written in the eye-witness accounts of the apostles, including John.

3. Testimony in the heart

'Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart' (5:10 NIV). John has supplied three external witnesses, and

then the witness of God himself, which is ample in any court—certainly in the court of God. Yet there are those who refuse to believe no matter how much evidence or how many witnesses are brought forward. Ultimately, the witness must come from one's own heart. Belief and witness come together here in verse 10. Both are 'heart matters', and both are the work of the Holy Spirit, already referred to as the Spirit of truth (5:6).

God the Father is in heaven, but his words are with us in the Bible. God the Son is also in heaven but we have the undeniable, historic record of his life here on earth from at least four witnesses. God the Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to dwell in the hearts of the elect of God. 'The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom 8:16). We can and we must know whom we have believed and be persuaded that he is able to keep us until the Day of Judgment (2Tim 1:12). In other words, we can and we must know that we have eternal life (5:11).

To reject the Spirit, whom God has sent to convict us of sin and give us eternal life, is to reject the truth revealed by all three witnesses. It is in effect saying that you cannot trust God and that God is a liar (5:10). In rejecting the call of God upon your heart and your life you do not think of yourself as calling God a liar but this is what you are doing; you are accusing God of lying. John has already told those who say they have no sin that they are making God a liar (1:10). Often it is the same person saying they are not a sinner, and doubting the truth of the gospel. I pray that person is not you!

I read an interesting story about a man in India who did not have assurance of salvation. The thing that troubled him above all else was that he had an idea that God had chosen an elect few that should be saved, and, as he had no evidence that he was among them, he could not know that he was saved. He went to a meeting where the preacher declared that a man was saved the moment he believed in Jesus, and that he possessed eternal life and could never

perish. The man thought, 'I would like to be sure of that'. When he got home he got down on his knees and prayed, 'O God, if it is possible for a man to be sure he has eternal life, show it to me now from your word'. He turned to 1John 5 and read these verses. When he came to the verse, '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', he said, 'I don't want to make Him a liar but I don't know what his testimony is'. He read in the next verse, 'This is the testimony'. He put his thumb over the rest of the verse, shut his eyes and prayed, 'O God, I have just been reading that if a man does not believe the testimony you have given of your Son, he makes you a liar'. He almost dreaded to lift his thumb, but finally he did and read, 'And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son'. 'Blessed be God!' the man said, 'So here and now I can know!' And his faith was confirmed as he read, 'He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life'.

In the Upper Room Jesus prayed, 'And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3). John reminds us in this letter, 'He who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son does not have life' (5:12). Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' and, 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 14:6, 11:25). Life, eternal life, is only found in Jesus Christ our Lord. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord you have eternal life, a life that begins the moment you believe, and that never ends. If you do not believe you do not have life; the opposite of life is what? Stott writes, 'The alternative is clear and uncompromising. We cannot escape its logic. Eternal life is in His Son and may be found nowhere else. It is as impossible to have life without having Christ as it is to have Christ without thereby having life also. This is because the Son is the life'. What do you say to all the witnesses to this truth?