



During my sophomore year of college at USF I owned probably one of the worst cars ever built—a 1994 Ford Escort Hatchback. I think I paid \$1600 for it. The radio had been stolen, it had the wonderful twinge of mildew in the interior, and it frequently broke down on me, once on the Bay Bridge during rush hour traffic. Late one night I was driving from a Sunday night church service in Castro Valley back to my dorm room and was happily crossing the Bay Bridge until I noticed bright lights and siren noises behind me. I was being pulled over. You know the whole drill, right?

“What seems to be the problem officer?”

“You were speeding.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Proof of insurance and registration.”

For some reason I had my registration but could not find my insurance. I was horrified! Not only did I get a speeding ticket, but I also received a ticket for no proof of insurance. This was going to be a huge ticket. Since I was a poor college student, I decided to try my luck and go to court and to show my proof of insurance and beg for a reduced fine. When my case was called, to my surprise, the police officer didn't show up! My case was thrown out because there was no witness. After showing the judge my insurance, I left with a small court room fee to pay! I was so happy!

I learned a very important lesson that day, well, actually three: don't speed, make sure you have proof of insurance, and always go to court praying the police officer doesn't show! We all know how important reliable testimony is in the court of law. And in the ancient world this was true too. According to Deuteronomy 19:15, no charge could be used against a person unless it could be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Today we are faced with hundreds of people claiming to know something about Jesus. Their testimonies start new religions and philosophies, they sell books, and they teach in the universities. Jeremy Bowen, the presenter of a 2001 BBC documentary of Jesus stated, “The important thing is not what he was or what he wasn't—the important thing is what people believe him to have been. A massive world wide religion, number more than two billion people follows his memory—that's pretty remarkable, 2,000 years on.” Jeremy Bowen is dead wrong. Who Jesus is and what he did is the foundation of our faith. Apostle John

in this love letter to the church in the city of Ephesus is calling the church to come back to foundational things. How can people come to faith in Jesus? What assurance do we have about our faith? John's answer is that faith depends on testimony. Here in chapter 5 John calls upon three witnesses to testify concerning the truth of Jesus. Two are objective historical witnesses; one is more subjective and related to our own experience.

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:6–8).

The Testimony of the Spirit, the Water and the Blood

We live in a world today that says nothing is certain and everything is up for grabs, especially what you believe about God. We are told we cannot know anything for sure. Then on the flip side, Christians are accused of “blind faith,” faith without any assurance of facts. Christianity is not just a great idea. It doesn't just make you feel better about yourself. The Christian faith rests upon facts. These facts, these testimonies, encourage our faith. Our faith rests on facts. Faith is acting on the facts you believe. John gives us three facts, three witnesses—the Spirit, the water and the blood.

Remember, one of the reasons John wrote this letter was to address false teachers who were dividing the church. The problem in the church came from a group of people who followed the teaching of a man named Cerinthus. He taught that the divinity of Jesus came upon him at his baptism and then left him at his crucifixion. In this way they could deny that the Christ had ever been truly human and subject to suffering and death. They couldn't wrap their minds around God becoming a baby and suffering on a cross. You may be thinking, what's the big deal about Jesus' birth and death? This heresy John was combating undermines the very foundations of the Christian faith. If the Son of God did not take upon himself our nature in his birth and our sins in his death, then he cannot reconcile us to God. This was and is a big deal. John states Jesus came by water and blood.

The Testimony of the Water

Let me just say this is a very difficult text to interpret. Our Church Fathers and scholars disagree as to what the water and the blood

represented. Augustine linked the reference to John 19:34, where the piercing of Jesus' side produced water and blood. Calvin and Luther connected it to John 4 and 6 and saw in it a reference to the sacrament of baptism and the communion. Others related it to Old Testament sacrificial symbolism, the water of purification and the blood of the sacrifice. More commentators today, however, agree with Tertullian and see the water referring to Jesus' baptism and the blood to his death on the cross. In my opinion, this is the right view.

The water refers to Jesus' public baptism by John the Baptist. Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his ministry and the blood, the cross, marked the end of his ministry. The water of baptism was the water of cleansing. It symbolized repentance and confession of sins. Let's consider the scene of Jesus' baptism found in Matthew 3:13-17.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus was without sin and did not need to be baptized. John knew Jesus had no sin and nothing to repent of and confess. So John thought that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus, being fully God and fully man, at the beginning of his ministry identified with man and his sin. By submitting to baptism, even though he had no sins of his own to confess, he proclaimed his identity with human nature, weakness, and sin.

At Jesus' baptism we also hear God the Father's voice making it very clear that Jesus was the sinless Son of God, **"This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased."** Jesus begins his public ministry in the waters of baptism. He aligns himself with the people who turn from sin and trust God. He is then approved by God the Father and given the Holy Spirit. This is the testimony of the water.

If you are a follower of Christ, did you know God says the same thing to you? You are his beloved son and daughter in whom he is well pleased. You don't need to earn his love. You don't need to prove yourself to him either. Someone needs to hear this today. You are his beloved child. He chose you. He loves you. He is well pleased with you. Live in that promise. Don't let the lies of this world and the enemy tell you any different!

The Testimony of the Blood

Jesus came not just by water, but by blood. Cerinthus and the Gnostics believed in Jesus. They probably said he was their Savior. But, they held he only came by water. They couldn't believe in a God who suffered and brutally died on a Roman cross. John makes a clear statement—the sinless life of Jesus cannot save us from our sins. Jesus was put to death not for his sins, but for the sins of the world. The death of Jesus is one of the essential ingredients to what we call the Gospel, the Good News. Apostle Paul said that the death of Christ was of first importance, **"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3). That "Christ died for our sins" (v .3) implies that Christ was sinless. God himself bore our sins and forgave us. On the cross he died for the sins of man to redeem us out of slavery to sin, Satan, and the way of the world. Christ not only came to teach repentance and purification by his baptism but to give new life by his blood.

The false teachers believed Jesus only came by water, not by blood. The problem still impacts the church today. If Jesus was just a mere man at his death, then we are still stuck in our sins and have no way to be reconciled to God. There is no forgiveness of sins, no freedom, no eternal life. The doctrine of the atonement means that God himself bore our sins and satisfied the wrath of God's judgement. Jesus died in our place and for our sins so that we could experience the grace and love of God. Jesus then proved he was God by rising from the dead three days later. Jesus was baptized and had the ministry of baptism. He came by water. Jesus willingly went to the cross to die in our place and for our sins. He came also by blood. Jesus Christ was declared the Son of God at his baptism and proved to be the Son of God at the cross. John says there is a third witness, the Holy Spirit.

The Testimony of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit bore witness historically in Jesus' baptism by coming down from heaven as a dove and remaining on him (John 1:32). (By the way, that is a great place to take someone who does not believe in the Trinity. At Jesus's baptism, we see all three—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.) After Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist said that this act of the Holy Spirit proved Jesus was the Christ, **"I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One"** (John 1:34).

We not only have the historical testimony of the Holy Spirit, he continues to witness to Jesus' identity through two things—the Scriptures and inner conviction.

The Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:16 says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”* As Christians we believe the Bible is inspired by God and without error. The phrase “God-breathed” is very similar to the name of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the Spirit is called *ruach*, which means wind, breath and spirit. In the New Testament he is called *pneuma*, which also means wind, breath and spirit. The point is this. If you want God to speak to you, if you want the Holy Spirit to witness to you, open up the book. Get yourself into the Bible. No matter what you are struggling with, no matter what is going on in your life, the Number One way we grow closer to Jesus Christ is through consistent time in his Word.

Inner Witness

Another way the Holy Spirit continues to witness today is within the lives of believers. Verse 10 says, *“Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony.”* Some translations add “in his heart.” The idea here is of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 puts it this way, *“Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* If you are a Christian and believe Jesus is Lord, it’s because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. The moment we trust in Jesus, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit. He comes to live in us and takes up residence in our lives. He sets up shop. One of the Holy Spirit’s job is to remind us that we are sons and daughters of God, *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children”* (Romans 8:16). His witness is our inner confidence that we belong to Christ.

God the Holy Spirit gives us the inner confidence that is in harmony with the other two witnesses. As we hear the Gospel—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—the Holy Spirit confirms those truths within us. When we hear and believe we know we are children of God. We can trust the witness of the Holy Spirit because he is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). God bears witness through the Spirit, the water, and the blood. What do they all agree on? John tells us that next.

God’s Testimony

We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (verses 9–12).

I want you to think about something for a moment. Isn’t it true that we act upon the word or testimony of others all the time, sometimes even strangers? A doctor says to take this medication and we do. A teacher says this is how the world is and we are tested on what she says. A police officer says you’re speeding, and you take the ticket. If you’re lost, you ask for directions and trust the person knows what he is talking about. John’s argument is essentially this, if you listen to mere men, how more dependable is God? If you are willing to take the word of a stranger and act on it, can you not believe the Word of God, especially when it has been written down by eyewitness testimony of these events?

Let’s think about this some more. Pretend someone comes up to you and asks a question, something you know the answer to. A question like, “Is the new *Hunger Games* movie out?” To which you reply, “Yes, it is, can’t wait to see it!” But, after that, what if they told you, “Well, you know, I’m really trying to believe you, but I’m not sure I can.” Wouldn’t you be insulted, like “What’s your problem bro? Are you questioning my integrity and character?” “No, no, no,” they say. “I would never do that. But, I wish I could believe what you say.” “What do you mean? Do you think I’m a liar?”

John says if you fail to believe God’s testimony then you insult him and call him a liar. God has given us the witness of the Holy Spirit, the witness of Christ with water and blood, the witness of creation (Romans 1), the witness of our conscience (Romans 2), the witness of the Scriptures, and the witness of hundreds of eyewitness testimonies. Yet still today people say, “I’m trying to believe. I wish I could believe. Oh, that I could convince myself that this is true!” To deny Jesus and his offering of salvation is to deny the witness of Almighty God. And God says when you do that, you’re calling him a liar.

John moves last to the heart of the whole matter in verses 11–12,

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

This is the content of God’s testimony. God has given men the thing they lack—eternal life. God bears witness through the Spirit, the water, and the blood that Jesus, the Son of God, is eternal life. If we believe God’s witness, then we have this life within us.

Jesus was all about life. To believe in Jesus is to have life (John 3:15–16). Jesus is the author of life (Acts 3:15). We are saved by his life (Romans 5:10). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Eternal life is life abundant. Life exciting. Life that is adventurous, full, meaningful, and relevant. God’s gift to man is a life that is lived

to the fullest. He who has the Son has life because the Son is life! That is the whole point of this letter.

Everything Jesus gives, Jesus is. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus shows us the way and yet said, "I am the way." Jesus opens the door and yet says, "I am the door." Jesus gives the bread of life and says, "I am the bread of life." Jesus gives life and Jesus said, "I am the life." Everything Jesus gives, Jesus is. Jesus has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son.

Eternal life is only found in Jesus. This claim angered the people of the first century just like it does today. The false teachers wanted to search for God in their own ways and on their own terms. The age of our day says tolerance is God. All truth is relative. John is not concerned with what people want to believe about God. John was concerned with fact. God has spoken. Fact. He has said that life can only be found in Jesus. Fact. We can reject what God says and when we do that we call God a liar. Fact. The purpose of God's testimony is evoke faith in Christ. It's to wake us up to the truth of the Gospel. Whose testimony will you believe?

What's Your Testimony?

In his book, *Has Christianity Failed You?* Ravi Zacharias, a well known Christian thinker, points to one of the greatest proofs for the truth of Christ and the reality of his resurrection: the changed lives of Christians. He writes: "During the course of nearly 40 years, I have traveled to virtually every continent and seen or heard some of the most amazing testimonies of God's intervention in the most extreme circumstances. I have seen hardened criminals touched by the message of Jesus Christ and their

hearts turned toward good in a way that no amount of rehabilitation could have accomplished. I have seen ardent followers of radical belief systems turned from being violent, brutal terrorists to becoming mild, tenderhearted followers of Jesus Christ. I have seen nations where the gospel, banned and silenced by governments, has nevertheless conquered the ethos and mind-set of an entire culture."

Why did God give us these witnesses? God gave us testimonies so we'll have a testimony. The Number One reason I love being a pastor is because I get to see God change peoples' lives all the time. And changed lives show the truth of Christ. We can argue forever about Jesus' baptism, his death and the role of the Holy Spirit. Those are important arguments. But, no one can argue against what God has done in your life. God changed John's life, he's changed mine, and he's changed yours. God gave us these testimonies so we'll have a testimony.

What's your testimony? What was your life like before Jesus? How did Jesus grab your attention? What is your life like now? I just want to encourage you today, as way of application, to share your testimony with one person who does not know Jesus this week. If we really believe Jesus is eternal life, if you really care for people in your life, then take my challenge and share your testimony with someone this week. Who knows how God will use it?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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