

“THE THREE WITNESSES”

I JOHN 5:6-8

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INTRODUCTION

John has just told us that the one who is born of God overcomes the world, and that the victory that overcomes the world is our faith. That faith is expressed by the belief that “Jesus is the Son of God.” John insists once more in the identity of the historic Jesus with the eternal Son of God; one must have faith in Him in order to be saved, have eternal life (10-12), and to “overcome the world” (vv. 4-5). But faith must be built on solid evidence and established by reliable witnesses.” Our faith is not a blind faith. The witnesses to such truth are of the very highest caliber as seen in vv. 6-9. In this section John shows both the character of the witnesses (6-8) and the effectiveness of the witnesses (9-12).

The Law of the OT established the principle that an accusation in a legal case could only become established by a minimum of two or three witnesses (Dt. 10:15; 17:6). Jesus insisted upon the same principle in Mt. 18:16 concerning the matter of church discipline, so did Paul in II Cor. 13:1. Christ insisted in the Gospel of John that He had adequate witnesses as to His person and work: the **seven witnesses** to Christ are *Scripture (5:39-47)*, *the Baptist (1:7)*; *the disciples (15:27; 16:30)*, *Christ’s works (5:36; 10:25, 38)*; *Christ’s words (8:14, 18; 18:37)*, *the Father (5:37; 8:18)*, and *the Spirit (15:26)*. In this epistle John gives 3 of those—the disciples in 1:2, the Father in 5:9-10, and the Spirit here; but **two more** are added—the water and the blood.

This is a very difficult passage due to the numerous views on what are “the water and blood” are, and because of the controversy over verse 7. However, the witnesses provided by God are solid, and their witness is clear: Jesus Christ is the Son of God in whom you must believe in order that you might have eternal life—there is no other person who can save, and there is no other way for you to be saved.

THE SPIRIT, THE WATER, AND THE BLOOD ARE CLEAR—YOU MUST BELIEVE ON JESUS THE SON OF GOD TO BE SAVED.

- I. THE WITNESS OF THE WATER—the Baptism of Jesus Christ.
 - A. Jesus is “this one”—v. 5.
 - B. Jesus “came”—historic event.
 - C. His baptism inaugurated His earthly ministry.
 - D. At His baptism He heard the divine voice—“This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”
 - E. His baptism was to fulfill all righteousness.
 - F. The Spirit came upon Him by which His identification was clear to John—Jn. 1:32-34.
- II. THE WITNESS OF THE BLOOD—the Sacrificial Death of Jesus Christ.
 - A. His shedding of blood indicates the atoning work of His death.
 - B. The pouring of blood and water from His side indicates that he was truly dead.
 - C. Reasons why we must not take “the water and blood of this passage to equal the “blood and water” of John 19:34:
 1. Jn. 19:34 puts blood and water in the reverse order of what we have in this text.
 2. The point of the Jn. 19 passage is to present proof of Jesus’ death, but the point of this passage is to support the reality of the historical ministry of the incarnate Son of God.
 3. This view does not explain John’s added words “not with the water only, but with water and with the blood.” Who would argue for only water coming out of Jesus’ side?
 4. Moreover, what would the event in Jn. 19:34 have to do with the idea that Jesus **came** by both water and blood? That event would better be expressed with “he left by both water and blood.”
 5. In Jn. 19 it was the appearance of water that was unusual at the piercing, not the blood, so that if John was referring to that event he should rather have said, “Not the blood only, but the blood and the water.”

6. The argument made by some that this is the only place where “water and blood” are so placed together is just not true: see e.g. Ex. 7:17-25 (5 times); Lev. 14:52; Mt. 27:24 (Pilate); Heb. 9:19.
- D. The Significance of “not by water only, but by water and blood.”
 1. Refutation of false doctrine of Gnostics—especially Cerinthus; Jesus the Son did come by water, but not by blood.
 2. His life was insufficient for our redemption; His sacrificial death was also essential.
- E. Reasons why we must not take “the water and blood” of the two ordinances:
 1. We have no example of “blood” being used for the Lord’s Supper.
 2. This passage speaks of past events in Christ’s life (“he came”), not of symbolic representations of those events.
 3. Observance of these ordinances recur, and relate to the ongoing life of the Christian Church. The emphasis in 6b is the same as 6a, and “water and blood” must mean the same thing in v. 8.
 4. John could not switch so dramatically the focus of his point from the historical events to the continuing exercise of His mission in the church.
 5. There is no mention here of the “body” of Christ which would be a significant omission if John intended us to think here of the Lord’s Supper.
 6. In what sense would Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper testify to the fact that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God? When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, and when Paul explained it (Mt. 26:26-29; I Cor. 11:25-25) neither place emphasis upon the Incarnation of deity.

III. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT—Both at Jesus’ coming and continuing now.

- A. The coming of the Spirit at the baptism in the form of the dove and His continuing witness in Jesus’ words and works and even in His death.
- B. The faith, knowledge, and confession of the congregation.
- C. The inner witness in the heart of the believer.
- D. The preaching of the Word. The Spirit bears present witness through His own inspired word.
- E. The Spirit is the One living witness, and He uses the two personified witnesses of water and blood (masculine participle with neuter “spirit,” “water,” and “blood”).
- F. These three witnesses “agree in one.”
 1. Total unity of statement. These three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, are in perfect agreement and harmony in their testimonies.
 2. Total focus on one main topic—Jesus, the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

Although “Rock of Ages” is a beautiful hymn, and teaches wonderful truths, I cannot concur with the statement in stanza one that the “water and blood” from Jesus’ side represents cleaning from impurity and salvation from wrath, or that they represent what John teaches in this passage.

What we see here is the agreement of three witnesses—the Spirit, the Water of Jesus’ baptism, the Blood of Jesus’ atoning death. These witnesses are sufficient for us to believe in Him for our salvation.

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