

Opening Words

Why is it that an overzealous monk added a verse to the original manuscript of Scripture? Today, let's find out what he did, and why.

346 43 1 John – The Witness 1

Today we are going to look at a portion of Scripture that has some difficult phrases in it that have often been misunderstood, but really can be quite easily understood when we know the historical context in which John is writing. Let's listen to 1 John 5:6-13.

⁶This 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. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

⁹We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

There's a lot going on in this passage – water and blood, three who testify about Jesus, man's testimony, God's testimony, calling God a liar, eternal life – yes, there's a lot going on!

The passage is also complicated because in one major translation an additional verse has been added. The King James Version of the Bible, translated in 1611, became the foundational text for the English-speaking world for 450 years. God used this translation in amazing ways in countless lives – including my own. I grew up reading the KJV. I memorized verses in it. I preached my first sermons from it. It was my study Bible until I was 19 years of age.

But the KJV has another verse in this section of Scripture that a lot of godly biblical Greek scholars say should not be there. Here's what it says.

⁶ This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Do you see the difference? The added verse speaks about the Trinity – The Father, the Word (Son), and the Spirit, and these three are one. Here is the clearest verse – it seems – in the Bible to substantiate the Trinity.

There's only one problem. This verse was not in the original manuscripts. Let me share three facts about this verse.

1. The words do not occur in any **Greek** manuscript, version, or quotation before the 15th century.
2. They first appear in an obscure Latin manuscript of the 4th century.
3. A 16th-century Greek scholar, Erasmus, included these words from this Latin manuscript in the third edition of his Greek New Testament and because Erasmus' work was so excellent in other ways, it became standard to accept this addition as part of the original text. The scholars who translated the KJV from the Greek into English evidently relied heavily upon Erasmus' Greek text. Thus, we have the words in the KJV of the Bible.

How did these words get into this Latin manuscript? The answer is an overzealous scribe wanting to include more "proof" for the Trinity. John's letter talks about three witnesses on earth – The Spirit, the water, and the blood, and so he thought this was a perfect place to speak of three witnesses in heaven – The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit. And even though he should not have done this, it shows the thinking of Christians living at that time – they believed in the Trinity. He also should not have done it because there are many other New Testament pieces of evidence for the Trinity.

Mt. 28:19 - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14 – The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Ephesians 2:18 - for through Christ we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 4:4-5 - There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

So, there you have it. We don't really need the inserted verse in 1 John 5 to teach the doctrine of the Trinity because it is all over the Bible anyway. The first three verses of the Bible have it with the mention of God, the Spirit and God speaking his word.

So, I want to make sure you understand what I am saying. I am saying that we do find evidence in Scripture for the Triune God. We just don't find it here in 1 John because John did not write those words about the Father, the Word, and the Spirit being three in one. So, let's focus on what John does say in this passage.

He does speak of three that testify. John uses the word testify or testimony nine times in this short section. We have the image of a courtroom. Sitting in the jury are the churches John has been shepherding for years. They must decide between the arguments of the attorneys.

The attorneys are in place. On one side of the courtroom is the team of Gnostic attorneys. These are the ones who have been beckoning the people in John's churches to come to their way of thinking, to receive their special knowledge, and to receive this new "Christ spirit" that will help them to forget about their bodies, to forget about others, to forget about what the apostles said and to ascend to realms of spiritual reality in heavenly places.

On the other side of the courtroom is an old man. He hardly seems competent. How can he stand against the team of sharp, well-dressed attorneys that the Gnostics are putting forward?

The Gnostics have presented their case. They have presented their witnesses. Person after person has come forward and spoken of a special new spirit they have received and of this inner enlightenment that will help them find the true God somewhere in the heavens.

John has cross-examined them. He did an effective job. He was able to poke holes in the testimony of these gnostic witnesses. They admitted that how we treat one another is not that important, even though Jesus said that, above all, we were to love one another. They admitted that holiness was not that important to them – that their moral behavior did not have a high priority. They admitted that they did not care much for the earthly Jesus and what he said.

It was an effective cross-examination. Now it is John's turn to produce his witnesses. He says he has three of them. They are the water, the blood, and the Spirit. These witnesses all have the same thing to say. What is their testimony?

Let's look first at the testimony of the water. What is John referring to? He is referring to the baptism of Jesus. When we read the Gospel stories, we discover this, when the man Jesus was baptized the Spirit of God came upon him and the Father in heaven pronounced something. What is it that God said? "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

But what do the words of the Father mean? We discover their meaning when we realize that the Father in heaven was quoting from two passages of the Old Testament and putting them together to make an important statement. The first passage was from Psalm 2:7, "This is my beloved Son." Psalm 2 is a royal psalm about the king. It begins by telling about the rebellion of the kings of the world and God's response to this rebellion. First, God laughs at such puny efforts of men, then God installs his king on Mt. Zion. This king takes his seat upon the throne and God says of him, "This is my beloved Son!" The beloved son, the beloved king then asks God in heaven to give him the nations of the world and the Father answers his prayer. The kings of the earth are then exhorted to obey the Son.

The second passage God quotes is from Isaiah 42. This is a prophecy of a servant who suffers yet who comes to bring justice to the earth. God speaks about this servant and says, "Behold, my

Servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights.” Why does God delight in this servant? He delights in him because he carries out the will of God on earth, and what is the will of God? It is to restore God’s reign on earth.

Two verses – one from Psalm 2, one from Isaiah 42. One focuses on kingship, one focuses on servanthood, and God in heaven brings them together and says both are true in the man being baptized! The one who is coming into and through the water is the Servant-King. He has come to restore the kingdom of God to earth but the way he restores the kingdom is not through the sword but through servanthood. He restores the kingship of God by submitting to the waters of baptism, identifying with sinners in an act of humility for he did not need to be baptized for his own sin. In fact, John said to him, “I need to be baptized by you!” But Jesus submitted to the waters of baptism for this act of humility in baptism would prepare the way for a life of humility which would culminate in the greatest act of humility of all – the cross. This is how the kingship of the world would be taken from rebellious kings and given to God’s king – through servanthood and through humility.

This was John’s first witness, the waters of Christ’s baptism, and John pressed his point home for the jury to hear. This Jesus who was baptized and received the Spirit of God is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the restoration of the kingdom of God to this earth! God’s destiny for his people is not to have them go to spiritual realms, always ascending to new heavenly worlds as the Gnostics taught. God’s destiny was for his people to rule a new earth restored by his King who would restore it by servanthood and humility.

John was ready to call his second witness to the stand, but this court must take a recess. We are out of time today, but I hope you will join us for our next broadcast as we continue to explore The Witness.