

God's Witness is True and to be Believed

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[0 : 00] Let's turn into the first letter of John, 1st John and chapter 5, and we'll continue our study in 1st John 5.

1st John 5, and particularly verses 9 to 12, we may just read from verse 9.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God, which he has testified of his Son.

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. 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.

And this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

[1 : 19] I want us to think about these verses in terms of God's witness is true, and to be believed. God's witness is true, and to be believed.

I think that it's fair to say, by way of introduction, that one of the things that we are very conscious of in these days, is the amount of attention that's given to fables, and to fantastic films, based on books written.

And children and young people and not so young people are so caught up in these, as if they were really true.

We're coming up to the time of year, when little children are wide-eyed as they listen to stories about Santa Claus, about Father Christmas.

And if anybody dares tell a grandchild or a relative's child, there's no such thing as Santa, you're scolded for it.

[2 : 34] You're scolded. Let them believe it. It's alright. Let them believe it. And it's the same with what we call the fairy stories.

Children will listen to them wide-eyed. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that it's wrong to read fairy stories to them, whether it's Grimm's fairy stories or whatever.

The point is being made here is to distinguish between what is fantastic, what is simply mythical, just a made-up story, however interesting, to teach a point, and what is absolutely and utterly true. And what we're seeing here, by way of introduction, is a great danger that with all, with the plethora of these fantastic stories, people lose sight of what is absolutely true, God's truth, God's witness to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have to be careful that we are understanding the weight and the meaning of the truth given to us by God for our eternal well-being, and for that of our children and our children's children too.

[3 : 52] We're dealing with matters of great weight, of great moment, of great eternal consequence. And it follows from that that the church should be concerned for doctrine.

How often we've heard over the past few decades that we don't need to focus on doctrine. It's not important to major on doctrine. But doctrine is simply teaching.

It's teaching we're to receive and believe and act upon. That's true, because it's God's to us. For our benefit.

That's why we were thinking just recently in one of the earlier studies, in fact in the book of Ruth, in the evening, how important it is to guard the truth, to guard what we say and how we say things, so that rumours are never allowed to flourish and to deceive and to cause harm.

We were looking at that. That has to do with truth. It has to do with truth. And it should be of great importance to us who profess to be Christians that we are jealous for the truth, as it bears upon each and all of us, the truth that God has revealed to us.

[5 : 18] But the problem, of course, the practical problem, is man has an insatiable appetite for falsehood. The Bible tells us man will naturally believe the lie before he will believe the truth.

And that creates all sorts of problems. It often means that good people, godly people, can be lied against and can end up in serious trouble.

You go to your Old Testament and some of the historical narrative there talks about good and godly people who were put to death by jealous people.

Take a story we all were taught in Sunday school long ago. The story of Naboth's vineyard. Naboth died eventually because the king was jealous and the king wanted his little, his father, Naboth's father's inheritance.

And he took it. Jezebel encouraged him to take it. Your king, take it. And what happened? They found witnesses who would lie.

[6 : 35] And the witnesses lied against Naboth and he died. And you can go through passages in the Old Testament that demonstrate this again and again.

And it can all be traced back to the father of lies. It can go right back to the garden and that question that was posed to our first parents.

Has God really said that? That you'll die for eating that fruit? Surely not.

Can't be. And so John is concerned here for us to see the importance of receiving God's witness because it is true.

And of believing that witness and of acting upon it. Guarding the truth jealously. In fact, John himself records a most illuminating passage in his gospel chapter 5, particularly verses 43 and 44, where he warns the Jews, the authorities, that they were not really receiving his witness, Jesus' witness, but they were receiving rather the witness of men.

[8 : 02] They honored men by believing them rather than by believing the Son of God. And it's interesting if you really trace through John's thinking, by the Spirit of course, but how he comes in this letter to open up this very subject.

The importance of seeing that what God has revealed to us in his word is truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We are to receive it and believe it and act upon it.

The first thing we want to do then is really to enlarge a bit on this point we've been making in the introduction.

God's witness is true. That's our starting point. God's witness is true. If we receive, verse 9, the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.

For this is the witness of God which he has testified. Notice that, the same word, martyrio. He has testified of his sin. In other words, God witnesses.

[9 : 13] God is in the dock, if you like. He puts himself there and he testifies. And what he testifies is the truth. And it is the truth concerning his sin.

And then he goes on, He who believes in the Son of God has this witness in himself. We'll look at that in a moment. But the first thing we're saying is, God's witness is true. Now some have argued, those who are into reading the philosophers will know that, some philosophers have argued that it stands to reason that God is true.

If there is a being worthy of the name God, if there is a being who is the sovereign creator of the universe, that being is worthy of this, that he is beyond reproach, that he is absolutely true and right in what he does, and therefore we can accept his word.

And some philosophers with a Christian flavor have argued like that. But that's not enough. It may contain some truth in it. It may even be true.

But it's not enough for us. That's not what John is talking about here. Because you see, man in sin operates contrary to this.

[10 : 38] He'll not easily accept this, though it may be true. Man is constantly trying to shift things around to mold God into the image that he has in his head.

And often that image is of a God who, not everything he says is to be believed. We're not to go all together on what we're told God says.

That's the approach. And you see, that takes us right back to the garden again. That's how Satan operated. Has God really said? All sorts of things are in the church today.

And people know, find they can't justify them by what the Bible says. And they'll give us reasons why we do this or do that, or why we have these folks now in the ministry and so on.

Because we're moving with the times. It's not because of what God said. But some are brazen enough to try and find a way of justifying it by appealing to the Bible.

[11 : 53] But my dear friends, history is writ large with people bearing false witness against God by saying, he said this when the Bible tells us clearly he did not.

God is not a deceiver. There is not the slightest hint of that in him. There is no Jacob in him. He is invincible to the assaults of evil and incapable of the same. And therefore, we remind ourselves that his witness is greater on account of who he is as the living God, as the God of truth. In fact, it's interesting that we are saying that it's relevant. It's interesting that in the Bible, in the Old Testament, God is called the God of the Amen.

I wonder if you've ever wondered where that word Amen came from. What does it mean? We say at the end of prayer, Amen. It's a Hebrew word.

[13 : 01] It's a word that we sometimes translate in the singing of the psalm, Amen, so let it be. Psalm 72, so let it be. But the word Amen is applied to God himself.

He is the God of the Amen. That is, he is the God of truth. It defines him. He is truth. Jesus is called the Amen, the faithful and true witness. And we need to remind ourselves of this. The witness of men, even when there are two or three witnesses, the witness of men is flawed because man is flawed. We know ourselves that when people tell a story, they never tell it, the two people never tell it the same way.

When they give a report, they never give it exactly in the same way. But when God gives us, for example, a fourfold account of the gospel, we are not to say, well, you take your pick, whichever one you like.

[14 : 13] No, we are to see what God is saying in those four accounts. God is not setting out to deceive us, no, but to instruct us and to make us dwell on his word.

As a God of truth. And if there is one thing, it is not the only thing I know, but if there is one thing that characterizes life today in 21st century UK, indeed the world, it is man's capacity for telling blatant lies and deceptions.

So much of what has come upon us in a crippling way through the collapse of financial institutions is about falsehood, deceptions.

And it's important for us to love the truth, to buy it up as the proverb says, to lay hold upon it, because we know that we're dealing with what God is and what he has communicated for our eternal good.

The witness of man at best is flawed and often very flawed. Indeed, we have a most remarkable illustration of that in a psalm writer who wrote by the Holy Spirit for our instruction.

[15 : 40] We sing it, I said in my haste that all men are liars. in a word he grossly overstated the matter.

The witness of man is flawed. And that's why in our own day there has been such an upsurge in false religion and in sects within the church, because people seem to want something different, something that tickles their fancy.

Those of us who are acquainted with JW teaching, the so-called Jehovah Witnesses, we know that they deliberately conceal what they really believe about the person of the Son of God and they've evolved on.

Anybody who knows it will know this. They've evolved on. Now they will call Jesus the Son of God. Well, actually, strictly, that's not right. They call him a Son of God. And then they talk about how he is different from the rest of us.

But if they're placed into saying, do you believe he is the eternal Son of God, who became man, the answer is no. People fudge it, but God's witness is greater than the witness of man, and it is a true witness.

[17 : 14] God's witness. It is greater because of himself and his own being as the truth, the Lord God of truth.

In my own experience, and I'm saying this, not having a go at Orthodox Jews or Jews at all, not a bit, but because I've heard it as a testimony.

there are Jewish people who are Orthodox in terms of their affiliation, but in terms of their theological belief, they're as liberal as they can.

They believe, I'll rephrase that, they say they believe the Hebrew Scriptures to be the word of God, but then it's qualified. They don't believe in the miracles, it never really happened.

And they set themselves against the witness of God.

[18 : 13] Our religion, the religion of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, is emphatically supernatural, and we make no apology for it.

We have the testimony of God to that end. God's witness is what we can rely on. All his words, said the psalmist, are words of truth and right, and all his commands are pure.

So we are by John and the other writers of Scripture encouraged to believe him, believe his great witness, because there is no end truth in him.

I was saying recently to you, we say all things are possible with God, but we don't mean literally universally all things, because blessed be his name, there are impossibles for him, and one of them is just this, it is impossible for him to lie.

That's a blessed impossible. His witness is true, absolutely true. And in this passage, that's what comes through, the tri-personal witness of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we have our true witness.

[19 : 41] And any attempt to evade the witness of God, both in Providence, in creation and Providence, and especially in Revelation, is dangerous to us.

Let God be true, said the apostle, and every man a liar, in relation to God being true, that is.

Let God be true. Now, the practical worth of this for us is obviously we've got a witness we can rely on, but it's also useful to us here today to ask ourselves the question, do I really believe this witness?

Do I take it, do I really believe the Bible to be the Word of God? And if we can say yes to that, wholeheartedly yes, then we need to see what that means.

Where did that belief come from? Is it something he has worked in us? If it is, we must take note of it.

[20 : 47] He is at work in us. Second thing we want to look at, is this, God's witness to his gift of eternal life.

Verse 10, he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. He who does not believe God, well we've looked at that, has made him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God gave, or that God has given of his Son.

And verse 11, and this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So God's witness here, as John considers it, is to his gift, God's gift of eternal life.

We notice here in verse 10, the one who believes in the Son of God, has this witness in himself. the one who continues to believe this, and act upon it, has the witness in himself.

You see, it is God's witness about eternal life, and how that eternal life is ours in his Son. It is given. It is a witness that's given to us, not only outside us, but within us, if we receive it.

[22 : 22] I love the words of Peter, speaking on behalf of the others too. You remember that astonishing incident that when Jesus had declared himself to be the bread of life, John 6.

People heard the words, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. And other things he said there, and they thought these were hard sayings, who can take them, and many, it says, many of his disciples went back from following him at that time, and Jesus said to his disciples, his intimate band, will you also go back from following me?

Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life, and then he says this, and we have come to believe for sure, we have come to believe for sure, that you have the words of eternal life.

We've come to believe it, and we've come to know it, we've come to experience the truth of it in our hearts. He who believes the testimony, verse 11, that God has given us eternal life in his Son, has that witness in himself, verse 10, he who believes in the son of God, has this witness in himself.

The objective facts and reality have come into our hearts, because we've believably received the witness of God.

[24 : 07] God, that's no small thing to notice, because you see, this eternal life is unobtainable by any other person.

By that I mean it doesn't come to us through another. It comes to us only by Jesus. It's not through faith in our religion, not even Christianity.

It's not through faith in any other religious leader, or pious person, or human efforts, however strict they may be. It comes by believing the witness of God, and receiving it into our hearts.

We have eternal life in his Son. And this witness comes to us uniquely from God himself, by his Spirit.

Earlier, in the last time we looked at this passage, we were looking at the witness of the Holy Spirit. And we were reminding ourselves that the witness that we receive in our hearts is the witness of the spirit in the word.

[25 : 28] The spirit conveys to us and seals to us this witness concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8, back there, the spirit, the water, and the blood, these three agree in one.

If we receive the witness of men, God is greater. We're receiving the spirit's word, as it were, on what it means that Jesus died in the room instead of others.

That out from his side, the side of the one who had died on the cross, flowed blood and water. And we embrace the witness of God, the witness of his spirit.

We receive it simply by faith. we cheerfully accept him, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our salvation.

He who believes in the sin of God, believing into him, has the witness in himself. Verse 11, and this is the witness or the testimony that God has given as eternal life, and this life is in his sin.

[26 : 47] one evangelical German commentator says this, he authenticates the evidence of the water and the blood in this spirit, capital letter, the believer has the witness of God in a real and actual manner as the object of experimental certainty.

In other words, we receive it and rest upon it because the spirit seals that to us. It's not just about our capacity to reason ourselves to it, it's about the inner reception of it, knowing it for certain because of the work of the spirit in applying and authenticating the evidence to our hearts.

hearts. This is not new in the sense that John already, if you go back to 1 John 3 24, you read these words, by this we know, that is we have experienced knowledge, that we remain in him by the spirit whom he has given us.

We know it experientially, experimentally, because of the spirit. We know it. And it is faith, yes, but there is certainty to it.

There is certain knowledge. By this we know, that we remain in Christ, by the spirit whom he has given us.

[28 : 33] I remember years ago, I used to have quite a friendly, robust debate, fairly frequently with a Jewish intellectual.

He was a principal of a college in Scotland, but professionally he had been a metallurgist of note.

and he was pretty acquainted with Christianity and very acquainted with Judaism. He used to say to me when I would be pressing on him the claims of Jesus, but you see, it is only a matter of faith.

I am a scientist. I need evidence. I need to have it on the slab. I need to see it. I need to scrutinize it. I need to see it.

I am an evidence-based thinker. And I said, the evidence for Jesus, who he is, where he has come from, and all that, it is documented in your own scriptures.

[29 : 42] Ah, yes, but you have to have faith. Yes, I said, it is faith, but there is a certainty to it. And the certainty arises, I hope you are following this, the certainty arises not in us, but in the spirit who authenticates the evidence to our hearts.

This is important, this is so vital to our understanding of what it means to have faith in the Son of God. By this we know that we are abiding in him by the spirit whom he has given us.

you find that again in 1 John 4 13. John repeats that again and again because he wants believers to know that the faith they have originated with God himself.

It is his gift. He switched us on. If today we are in Christ, if we have believed the witness, it is because we have been switched on by the spirit of God.

And that faith that originated by the spirit working in us, recognizes the absolute truth of God's witness and of his word to us concerning salvation.

[31 : 10] The testimony of God to us is certain. It is given to us in the scriptures. And we don't need to be embarrassed about that.

We believe the word of God, the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and we have the spirit, the real author of it, who authenticates that to us.

And particularly as it bears on our eternal well-being, we have the spirit sealing to us the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we have eternal life.

Now, time is hastening on, so the last thing I want to look at in this connection is God's witness is to life in his son. Now, we know that means eternal life, but notice how he puts it in the closing verse, he who has the son, that's Jesus, has life.

He who does not have the son of God, does not have life. And this thought of life, in Christ, in the enfleshed word, figures large in John's thinking.

[32 : 38] He has, under God's blessing, this particular view of life, through the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, at the beginning of this letter, he says that which was from the beginning, which we have seen, which we have heard, which we have handled, concerning the word of life.

And the life was manifested, and we have seen and declared to you that eternal life, who was with the Father, and was manifested to us.

At the very beginning of this letter, and in fact, at the beginning of his gospel, he emphasizes that in a most profound way.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was, as to his nature, God. This one was with God in the beginning.

In him is life, and the life was the light of men. That's John describing him.

[33 : 58] And you see, in this passage that we're concluding our thinking on, he says, he who has the son really has life. life, he who does not have the son of God, does not have life.

And it's interesting that when Jesus came to the final section of his earthly ministry, prior to his crucifixion, in the upper room there in Jerusalem, he prayed what we call the great high priestly prayer.

He says this in verse 2 of John 17, as thou hast given him, that is, the son, to have authority over all flesh, it is to this end to give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

And this is life eternal, that they might know you in a practical experience. way. And Jesus Christ to me have sent.

And how is that possible? By the witness of the Spirit in the Word within our hearts. And the witness of God, let me remind you, is true.

[35 : 22] True life in all its fullness and completeness is found only and communicated through the Spirit of Christ. Christ. Again and again, John emphasizes this, that believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have it.

We have eternal life. It's not something that we're going on to and have to wait for. That's true about the consummation of eternal life.

But when we believe in this world, in time, we have it. We're brought into a whole new dimension. Life in the Spirit is life eternal, is fellowship with the living God.

We have a living union with the living God. And this body may creak and groan increasingly. We may weary and fail in the eyesight, in our hearing, in our joints, in our internal organs.

but these changes and decay that we feel and see don't alter the reality of having eternal life in the sin of God, having received the witness of God.

[36 : 47] And so it's important for us to see what we have in believing the report, in receiving the witness of God. God, as the Spirit authenticates to us, the gospel is true.

And that there is eternal life in the one who is at the heart of that message. And that there is development in our fellowship with him who is the divine son of God, our prophet, priest, and king. In him we already have everlasting life. And as we finish, we may be bold to say this, flesh and blood has not revealed that to us, but the spirit of the heavenly Father.

let us glory in the testimony and the witness of God that he has given to us, that he has sealed to us, or may seal to us if we will but receive it, as his gift to us.

And let us rely upon that same spirit to teach us and develop us on in the faith. May we know for sure in him that we have received his witness, and let us declare our interest in him, and not be ashamed of that.

[38 : 31] And John says, if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which he has testified of his son.

He who believes in the son of God, has the witness in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed God's testimony that he has given of his son.

May we be believing in the true and blessed sense of that word. Amen.