

First John (18) - Believing God's Testimony

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] The previous passage ending there in verse 5, who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not by the water only, but by the water and the blood.

Well, you're very well aware, no doubt, that quality of evidence is seriously important in any cases that are carried out in a court of law.

The quality of evidence is crucial, whether we're thinking of the case presented by the prosecution or the case presented for the defence. It doesn't really matter the quality of evidence, very largely, is what the outcome of the case of the trial turns on, whether the person accused is guilty or not guilty.

The quality of evidence is crucial in handling whatever accusations are brought and whatever testimony is brought into court. And the passage here is about quality of evidence.

This time it's God's evidence. Evidence that God is presenting and has presented about Jesus Christ, His Son, about the life that is in Him.

[1 : 23] And the passage is very much about the quality of that evidence that you find about Jesus Himself. It is God's testimony. He's the one who's bringing the evidence.

You remember Jesus, as we read in John itself, the Gospel of John, chapter 5, spoke there about evidence about Himself, evidence concerning His ministry and His person.

Well, here is John, the apostle, also speaking, picking up that same theme and saying this is the testimony that God has about Jesus and about Himself.

And in order to present that testimony and show the quality of that evidence, God is calling on three witnesses. John is saying this is God's case.

This is God's presentation of the case in favour of His Son as the Saviour and the life that is in Him. He's producing three testifying witnesses to testify to this evidence.

[2 : 24] There's the water and the blood and the Spirit. You can see there, verse 7, verse 6, the Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is truth.

And for there are three, verse 7, that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood. So we'll need to look carefully at what that means. Who are these, who are these, or what are these three witnesses that testify in favour of Jesus and the salvation, the life that is found in Him for sinners like ourselves.

And, as is always the case, in any court of law there will always be some that refuse to accept the evidence, however clear it is. And that's what you find in this instance as well.

Although it's the clearest and the most compelling evidence that God gives towards emphasising Christ Himself, the life that's in Him, you'll see that it says, whoever has not believed does not have life.

And whoever believes the testimony that God has given of Himself, He has that testimony in Himself. So it's all to do with the testimony about Jesus, testimony that God is giving us, and whether or not we accept that, believe that, or not.

[3 : 47] And, of course, the outcome in each case is very clearly specified as well. For those that don't accept the evidence, the outcome is that they don't have life.

And for those who accept the evidence, and accept this testimony, and put their faith in this Christ, the outcome is the opposite. Whoever has the Son has life, and whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So let's look at the quality of evidence, these three witnesses, first of all, verses 7 to 8. And then we'll look at the two contrasting responses to the evidence that you find in the rest of the passage.

This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies.

Now, what does He mean that He came by water and by blood? The word by there means that He came through, or by means of, water and blood.

[4 : 47] So in order to answer the question, what does John mean by this, we have to say that these point to historical events or evidence that has historical reality about it.

Things that you can see existed in the life of Jesus on earth. Things through which He came Himself as His own personal experience. And through these experiences, and through seeing Jesus coming through and being involved in these experiences, God is saying, this is my testimony to you about who He is and about what He's in the world to do.

He came through water and blood. But what does He mean by water and blood? But if there are things through which Jesus came, or events, or instances, or things in His life that you could see He came through, and were His own experience, what is it?

What is this water? What is this blood? There are various commentators who have various views about this. But the best one, I think, is the most compelling one, is that by water, John means or refers to the baptism of Jesus.

And by blood, he means the death of Jesus. These two critical events in the experience of the Lord, in the experience of the incarnate Son of God, are part of the way God produces and presents the testimony as to who He is and what He's in the world for.

[6 : 11] And if you think of the first of those that He came by water, well, the baptism of Jesus is itself a very significant event in the account that we have in the Gospels of this.

For example, let's just turn to Matthew chapter 3. And if we read these verses in chapter 3, verses 13 to 17 especially, we'll find there something of what we're saying about this testimony, this witness, that is, through the baptism of Jesus.

So verse 13 of chapter 3 of Matthew, Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by Him. John would have prevented Him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to Me?

Whereas John is really saying, this is the wrong way around. Something like Peter, when He came to wash, when Jesus came to wash His feet along with the other disciples. So He's saying, this really isn't the right way around.

But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. In other words, Jesus is saying, It's by Me submitting to this life, this service of a servant, which is indicated here by His commissioning into the service that He came to fulfill in the world through baptism.

[7 : 31] This is, as He says, how we fulfill all righteousness. Then He consented, and when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up out from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him.

And He saw the Spirit descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

And you can see how that fits easily with what John is saying in 1 John 5, this passage we've got before us, that He came by water. When Jesus was baptized, and identifying with those that He was coming to save, this was His initiation, this was His consecration, if you like, into the work of the servant.

He was commissioned to carry out the work of the servant that He came to fulfill in the world. And the Spirit, as the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, God, the Father, spoke through that, and said, This is my beloved Son, the one on whom the Spirit came to rest.

This testimony from heaven was, This is my beloved Son. This is the one I have sent into the world for this specific task. He came by water.

[8 : 46] And it's interesting that in Matthew there, you have that reference to the Spirit, and this verdict from heaven, from God the Father, This is my beloved Son.

Now in 1 John, that's what we're saying. This is He who came by water, who came into this world, the incarnate Son of God, who taking our nature, placed Himself under baptism, not because He had any sins of His own.

This wasn't symbolic of His need to be forgiven, of His need to be cleansed, as baptism is for us. And for Him, that wasn't the case. But He was going to take the sin of His people.

He took the sin of His people. He had taken the sin of His people by this stage. He came to bear their sin. He came to bear them and pay the penalty and the price of sin. And He came to put Himself under the demands of that servitude.

And He's ushered into it through His baptism and declared to be the Son of God. And secondly, He came by blood.

[9 : 53] This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by the water and the blood. Every time you find this referred to in this way in Scripture, the blood, or the shedding of blood, it always means death.

death. And most often, it actually refers to a violent death. The shedding of blood is a violent death. It's not a natural death. It's not a death that comes by natural causes.

It's the taking of life by violent means. That's the kind of death that Jesus suffered. That's the kind of death He took to Himself. Remember, it's not just in terms of His physical death as you see Him on the cross.

That is indeed very much a part of His death. Remember, there's something else going on in His soul. Remember, He's talking there about the separation that He experienced from God the Father.

Why hast You forsaken Me? My God, my God. So, there's a violence. There's a violence in the death of Christ outwardly as He's crucified, as He's abused prior to that, as He's taunted, and as He's tied to the cross and as He's physically scourged.

[11 : 08] And all that you find in the Scripture, brief though it is, is still a very telling account of the enormous suffering that Jesus experienced, even in terms of His physical and mental torture, let alone the sufferings of His soul.

In other words, He came, says John, by blood. He came into the world specifically to die. Not just to be baptized and thereby, in a sense, identified with those He came to save, to be a servant on their behalf and for their benefit.

That had to also include the death that He died in their place. The death that was due to them for their sin, but that He took to Himself. And remember, back early on in our studies in chapter 1 of this letter of John, we find here in chapter 1 a reference to this in verse 7, where we find that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins in verse 9, but prior to that, the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin if we walk in the light as He is in the light.

So even there, John is referring to the blood of Jesus Christ, the benefit of His death, the nature of His death, the kind of death that He died. And here in chapter 5, He is emphasizing that for us again.

He came not by water only, but by the water and the blood. By all that you find from the beginning of His public ministry right through to its end in the death of the cross.

[12 : 45] He came by that. And by that, Jesus was identified as the Savior. And here is God saying, here is John saying, God is presenting His testimony to us through all of these events, through these specific events that Jesus entered through and experienced.

This is the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. But why does John include both? Why does he tie them so closely together?

Why does he say, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood? Would it not have been enough for Him to say that He came by the blood, He came by the cross, that the cross was sufficient evidence as to who He was?

Why does he say, not by water only, but water and the blood? Well, I think that goes back to the kind of false teaching or heresy that John was dealing with in this letter. We've mentioned it a number of times throughout the letter.

And we cannot really say for sure, a hundred percent, the nature of that heresy. But there was a man who lived, a famous theologian, who lived around about one generation or so after the Apostle John.

[13 : 56] The Apostle John, as we take it, died around about 100 AD. He was the last of the apostles. And this man, Irenaeus, who was a bishop in Lyon, he lived from 130 to 202.

So we're talking about something like maybe a generation, 70 or 80 years or so after the Apostle John. Irenaeus would then have been an acting Christian and a leading figure in the church.

And Irenaeus wrote a very famous book called Against Heresies. And the heresy that he actually wrote against seems very much like a development of what John was facing in his day as an apostle and that he was writing about here, the heresy of Gnosticism.

And Gnosticism had in it an emphasis that, especially that kind of Gnosticism that Irenaeus was facing. And this is giving us, as I say, just a clue or a key into the kind of thing John was dealing with and early form of it, it's reckoned.

And that kind of heresy that had made its way into the church and that John was combating with his very firm teaching about Jesus, it really said that actually the important thing is not your physical attributes.

[15 : 12] The important thing is your mind. The important thing is what you have in your spirit or in your soul, your mind, your thought processes, the conclusions that you reach there.

And in order to present that heresy, what they were saying was the Christ was a divine spirit. Something like this. The Christ was a divine spirit, not necessarily God, but a divine spirit who came from heaven, descended upon this human being, Jesus Christ, at his baptism.

And then before his death on the cross, he departed from him again. Because if he was a divine spirit, he would not be subject to death. That's the kind of thing, very briefly, that that heresy contained.

So in other words, Jesus was not the son of God. He was not divine. He was specially chosen by God. He was specially endowed by God. He was somebody that was quite an extraordinary person.

But he wasn't God. He wasn't the son of God. You mustn't think of him as divine. Because the important thing is not who he was physically, but that this divine spirit came upon him.

[16 : 23] You might think, well, that's just old-fashioned heresy. That's just old-fashioned teaching. Why mention that today? And why bring that out of the text that you have here? Even if it was something that John was dealing, what relevance does that have to the world in which you and I live today?

Because we don't have that sort of Gnosticism going about in the church, do we? Well, it's in the world. And it's in the church as well. When you look at the current state of things in regard to people's view of human nature and of human relationships, this is exactly what you find.

Because the important thing for such people is not what your physical attributes are, but what you think in your mind. Because if I'm born, people like that will say, if I'm born with male attributes, with all the features of maleness, or a man, that's really irrelevant.

If I think in my mind that I should be a woman, that's what I am. That's who I am. Or vice versa. If I'm born with female attributes, and I think in my mind that I ought to be a woman, and I want to be a woman, and present myself as a woman, that's the important thing.

And if you're actually in any way seeking to combat that with Bible teaching, then you're immediately said to be phobic, transphobic, or homophobic, or whatever the phobic is.

[17 : 49] But that's what it goes back to. It's not new. It's an ancient heresy, or a form of the ancient heresy, and new clothes. And it has that serious, serious outcome that people are left utterly confused, and certainly completely contrary to what the Bible teaches about human nature, about what human beings are, how they were made.

That's where it comes from. So for John to say this, of course important in his day regarding Jesus, but these ideas are still current, and they're not of minor importance.

If Jesus Christ is not the Son of God who came into this world and took out human nature and came through water, through his baptism, through identifying with his people and their need, and came, if he's not the person who came also through his death on the cross, there is no salvation.

That's why it's so serious. You can make what you like, people can make what they like, of this person, Jesus Christ. They can say he was an extraordinary human being. He must have been an amazing human being to listen to.

He was a most incredible teacher. He had such wonderful qualities. He was divine-like. But if you don't believe that he rose from the dead, there's no salvation.

[19 : 12] If you don't believe that this was the Son of God himself, a person of the Godhead, who came through water and through the blood, these very personal experiences of Jesus Christ, there's no salvation anywhere else.

It doesn't matter what people invent or people believe or people disbelieve. This life, John is saying, is in his Son.

There it is in verse 11. And who is the Son? The one who came by water and by the blood. Tonight, you're looking for a Savior or you know a Savior.

And you're looking for a Savior because you know that you're a sinner, that you need something for eternity, more than you can produce yourself. And you look to the Bible and you find God is saying, well, here's my testimony as to where the Savior is and who the Savior is.

It's this person. It's my Son. Look at the testimony that I am producing for you. Here are my first two witnesses. The water and the blood.

[20 : 21] The baptism of Jesus. The cross, the death of Jesus. And they are telling witnesses to Christ as to who he is, what he came into the world to do.

This is God's compelling evidence. And he's setting it before us so that we'll see the whole Christ, the whole person of Christ in the Gospel and say, that's the Savior and the life that I need is in him as the Son of God.

Then there's a third witness. The Spirit is the one who testifies and rightly you find the Spirit, the word there with a capital because John is talking about the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

And the Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. It doesn't mean that the other testimony is not as valid as the one of the Spirit, but what he's saying is that the Spirit, if you like, is the primary witness.

And it's by the Spirit and the witness that the Spirit bears that these other witnesses are said to be compelling. The death of Christ, the baptism of Christ, the Spirit points to these and says, there is evidence for you of who Jesus is.

[21 : 38] But you know what I say about the Spirit. The Spirit bears witness. He is the one who testified because the Spirit is truth. What you need in a witness is for that witness to be reliable.

If a witness is found to be unreliable, then that's it. That testimony is of no use. Anybody who lies in court or perjures themselves or herself, their witness, their testimony falls to the ground, is thrown out.

They're unreliable. But he's talking about the Spirit of God, the reliability of the Spirit himself who is truth, who is God.

There's no possibility that in any way this witness could not be telling the truth, that this witness could be unreliable, that the testimony of this witness somehow would be something you'd be suspicious of.

The Spirit is the truth. And then you find this. There are three that testify. The Spirit, the water, and the blood.

[22 : 49] And these three agree. There's this corroborative evidence. This is evidence where each of the three witnesses absolutely agree in their testimony.

The Bible, early on in Deuteronomy, specified that nothing was to be taken as reliable testimony unless it was confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses.

Deuteronomy 15 and verse 19. It had to be at least a minimum of two, preferably three, witnesses that would themselves corroborate this evidence that would actually together present a united witness to the truth of what was being presented.

Without that, the case couldn't go ahead. So here he is saying, these three agree. These witnesses are in complete agreement. They haven't made it up, each one of them.

It's something that they all unite around. This is God's testimony through Christ's baptism, through Christ's death, through the Spirit of God as the truth, and the total agreement as to who this Jesus is, as to why he came into the world, as to what the purpose of his mission is, and as to who he is today.

[24 : 17] And that's why you have this evidence as indisputable. And in verse 9, he really clinches it with that when he says, if we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.

Now, just take that with you. Keep that in your mind in terms of the quality of this evidence, the quality of these three witnesses, the compelling evidence that God is giving us about Jesus and about life in him.

Take that into our second point, which is the two contrasting responses to the evidence. Verse 10, whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Whoever does not believe, God has made him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son.

And whoever has the Son has life, whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. Whoever believes, whoever believes this testimony, that person comes to have life.

[25 : 35] Why? Because there are three things here that John very closely joins together that you can't really separate. He talks about receiving the testimony of God.

He talks about believing in the Son of God. And he talks about having the Son of God. And you cannot really separate these. They all belong to how we deal with this testimony, this evidence, and receive it positively.

Because wherever you have someone receiving this testimony, testimony, it's somebody who believes in this testimony. Wherever you have somebody believing this testimony, that's somebody who has the Son, who has taken the Son, received the Son of God as a Savior as well.

And that's why he says that whoever believes has the testimony in himself. If you have tonight faith in Christ, where does that faith come from?

You didn't produce it. it is an act of your soul. In that faith, you've come to trust in Christ, to lay your confidence upon him.

[26 : 42] But it's a product of the Holy Spirit. And you carry about in your life, the very life of God and the Spirit of God mysteriously inhabiting your soul.

You have the evidence in yourself. I spoke this morning at the Galax service about how we come to love the law of God. Where does that come from? Where does that love for the law of God come from?

Did you produce it yourself? Did I actually create it myself? Did I work at it until I finally reached that peak of acceptance that yes, this law of God is something that I like, something that is good for me, so I might as well just accept it?

No. It's a product of being born again. It's a product of rebirth. It's a product of having by the Spirit of God being persuaded as to who God is and who Jesus is and what the law of God is.

So here he's saying, if we receive the testimony of God and believe in the Son and have the Son, we have that testimony in ourselves, we carry it in our souls.

[27 : 47] It's not out there, now it's within our hearts. us. And we have it because we have the Spirit and the Spirit testifies to Jesus in our souls.

But whoever does not believe, whoever does not believe God, whoever does not accept this testimony willingly and take it to heart and act upon it, you see what he's saying?

He has made God a liar. Why is he able to say that? Why is he putting it that strongly?

Well, go back to the quality of the evidence. Go back to the reliability of the three witnesses, whose testimony each of them agrees with the other.

It's a combined, complete, and perfect testimony. testimony. It's the most compelling evidence you can get. And it's God's testimony. It's what God is saying, this is my case for salvation.

[28 : 54] And if any of us tonight or anyone says, well, I hear you, Lord, but I don't believe it. I don't accept it. What are you actually doing? When you're saying you don't believe God's testimony, you're effectively making him, as John says, a liar.

And see what that means. That a rejection of the evidence and not taking of Christ to yourself, when you have such compelling evidence in favor of it, it's not something that's harmless or a neutral decision that leaves you in some sort of state of limbo or neutrality.

It is a seriously big sin. a seriously big sin. Why? Because you're making out that God isn't telling the truth.

That God is actually a liar after all. That his testimony is unreliable. Why is he giving us this testimony? It's so that we believe in his son. It's so that we will accept the testimony and come to trust in this Jesus for ourselves.

whoever does not believe has made God a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God is born concerning his son.

[30 : 26] That's why he can say very bluntly but very clearly in the final verse whoever has the son of God has life. Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life.

Now you can't imagine the apostle John presenting this coldly to his people. We wouldn't want to do that either. This is the loving disciple.

This is a disciple who cares passionately about people's spiritual well-being. Who cares so much about their well-being that he sent them this letter so that he tells them about these false teachers and the danger that they're facing and the need to refute them and the need to actually not capitulate to their teaching.

This is a man who passionately believes that he's talking to people for eternity and with a view to eternity. That's what we're doing in this pulpit.

Kenny and myself preach the gospel. gospel. I know we can present it much better than we do. I can at least. Better than I do.

[31 : 41] I know that perhaps at times we give the impression that we lack love because we want to be so true to scripture. That's really not the case.

we're following the very mind of the apostle John when we're saying this lovingly to you tonight. You have the evidence.

You know that evidence is compelling. You know whose evidence it is. God has given you that evidence. Do you have his son?

Do you have the life? for which the son came into the world? We have the testimony. We hear the witnesses.

Surely tonight however you came into this building friends surely you're not going to turn and go out of this building and say no it's just not quite compelling enough for me.

[32 : 48] I'm still not willing to accept it. Well can you look into the face of God and say that? Can you?

Can you see I know what the evidence is. I know Lord what you're saying it is. I know these three witnesses are speaking the truth that they all agree in the testimony.

please please then say Lord help me to accept it and receive it and receive you and receive your son because this is all about him and our relationship to him.

Whoever has the son has life. Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life.

It couldn't be plainer could it? It couldn't be more compelling. It certainly couldn't be any less important than John makes it.

[34 : 01] so tonight receive the evidence and receive the Christ about whom this testimony is because this life is in his son.

Let's pray. Lord our God forgive us we pray when we find ourselves so reluctant to receive your testimony.

Forgive us for the closeness of our heart Lord we know that we have brought this upon ourselves and our sin and our fall and our rebellion against you. Lord we pray tonight that you would remove that resistance that you would remove all that keeps us from receiving that evidence fully and receiving your son as our savior.

We pray as you speak to us Lord through your word that your Holy Spirit will convince us not only of our need of Christ but of our willingness to make us willing to receive him.

We pray that you would receive this our thanks and hear our prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well let's conclude this evening in Psalm 119 119 and on page 414 in Scottish Psalter verse 164 and at verse 164 and sing the four verses to the end of that section.

[35 : 32] June this time is Huddersfield. Seven times a day it is my care to give due praise to thee because of all thy judgments Lord which righteous ever be.

Great peace of they who love thy law. Offense they shall have none. I hoped for thy salvation Lord and thy commands have done. My soul thy testimonies pure observed carefully.

On them my heart is set and them I love exceedingly. Thy testimonies and thy laws I kept with special care for all my works and ways each one before thee open are.

These verses to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

[37 : 00] Amen. Amen. My salvation, Lord, and thy commands have done.

My soul, thy testimony is pure, observe the care for thee.

On them my heart is set, on them I love exceedingly.

Thy testimony is at my loss, I get with special care.

For all my works are with each one, before thee open up.

[38 : 17] I'll go to the main door this evening. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Amen.