

Pentecost 1/Trinity

1 John 5:5-12 – Have We Put the Truth of the Trinity on Trial?

May 29-30 2010 by: Pastor Wessel

1 John 5:5-12 – ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

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.

Introduction – A lot of people are asking questions. How did it happen? What are you going to do about it? Why is this happening now? The disastrous explosion at an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico has resulted in millions of gallons of oil coating the surface of the water. The oil is threatening wildlife, damaging ecosystems, and dashing the hopes and dreams of those whose lifestyles are dependent on clean Gulf waters and their bounty of food.

So a lot of people are asking questions and people are offering their testimony, trying to explain what happened, why it happened, what the impact is, and what is going to be done. Our leaders in the government, citizens all around our nation, and citizens all around the world are listening to the testimony and making their judgments – taking their stand on this issue.

Usually people need to offer testimony when there are big question that need to be answered. When people aren't sure about a certain subject, they want to enlist the help of witnesses who will testify to the truth. This helps people have a clearer picture of the issue and helps them to make their judgments based on facts, not just on personal opinions.

There quite a bit of talk about testimony in the section of God's Word that we have before us today. What was the problem? Why did John, the man who wrote down this letter, need to direct the people of his day to the testimony? The issue he needed to clear up for people was, "Who was Jesus?" As the Apostle John grew older, as his experience of walking and talking with Jesus pushed further and further back in history, John saw people around him teaching some facts about Jesus that just weren't true. So, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, John wrote this letter to let people know the truth about Jesus.

There was a great deal at stake. If people got the teaching about Jesus wrong, then people would be wrong about the very nature of God. Basically, we would have to say that, as the Apostle John grew older, the truth of the Trinity was on trial. When you change what the Bible teaches about Jesus, then you change what the Bible teaches about God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as well. It happened very easily in the first century when human philosophies and logic God mixed in with God's teaching. It happens very easily today when people mix in logic and science and personal subjective feelings with the truth of God's Word. Because of this great danger, it is good for us to ask ourselves:

Have We Put the Truth of the Trinity on Trial?

I. This Trial Calls for God's Testimony

II. This Trial Has at Stake Eternal Life

I. This Trial Calls for God's Testimony

What is the testimony that John points us to? It is God's testimony about Jesus. "*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.*" The three witnesses work together and present for us one picture. They do not contradict each other. They are reliable: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. What does it mean?

I have no doubt that it was clear to the first readers of John's letter. Why write a letter to confuse people? But for us and for Christians of the past 2,000 years, the issue is a little more difficult. There have been a number of different interpretations and in this case we can say that it is okay to have different interpretations, because they all support the basic truth that John is emphasizing about Jesus: Jesus Christ is 100% God the Son, and he is also 100% a human being, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, we estimate around the year 4 B.C.

But what are the water and the blood that the Holy Spirit unites with in testifying about Jesus? Some have taught that it refers to the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side on Good Friday when the soldier jabbed him with a spear. John records that incident in his gospel as proof that Jesus had truly died. Others have taught that the water and the blood

refer to the sacred acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which Jesus Christ connects to his disciples throughout the ages.

A third explanation seems to fit best in the context of the letter: the water and the blood refer to the water of Jesus' baptism and his blood which he shed on the cross. At the time of the Apostle John, a false teacher named Cerinthus taught that Jesus of Nazareth was a wise and good human being, born of Mary and Joseph. He taught that a supernatural being called Christ, entered Jesus of Nazareth when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. He also taught that Christ left Jesus of Nazareth during the time of his suffering, before he died. Logically, Cerinthus' teaching avoids the fact of God becoming a man and being both at the same time.

But, as the Gospels teach us and as John seems to emphasize here, Cerinthus' teaching is false. *"⁶This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood."* In the Gospels, the baptism of Jesus Christ is one of the key passages that shows us the God as Three Persons, Yet One God. But there is no indication that Jesus was becoming someone new at that point. Matthew and Luke describe clearly that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary – the Son of God. Matthew records this about Jesus' baptism: *¹⁶As 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 lighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:16, 17)

In the Gospels, the death of Jesus is one of the key passages that assure of we are saved. The Bible is clear that no one person can ransom the life of another, much less pay for the sins of the world. But the innocent Son of God, dying for the sins of the world, is clearly shown in the Bible as the way to be saved. Luke records: *"⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last."* (Luke 23:44-46)

Jesus Christ the Son of God did come by water and blood. At his baptism, God testified that he was his Son and the Holy Spirit came to him. At his death, Jesus, destroyed the barrier set up by sinful human rebellion against God. These are the words recorded for us by those to whom God sent the Spirit to "guide [them] into all truth." (John 16:13) The testimony they recorded we believe to be the all knowing testimony of God himself, not merely the testimony of one human viewpoint. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples and as John's letter says: *"it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."*

Of course, there are many who do not accept the testimony recorded by the disciples, but instead accept the testimony of modern research. They will say that there are many other testimonies about life from ancient writings and from around the world that we need to read and digest. The goal of modern research is to get what they believe is an objective and truthful picture of Jesus and the disciples and religious belief.

As Christians, we are here to make a stand. There are some very important statements from this section of John's letter that we say over and over again that we agree with. *"The Spirit is the truth."* As Christians, we say that the Holy Spirit is the one who has changed us so that we don't see the truth just as we see it, but as God reveals it in the Bible. By the Spirit, we believe what God tells us, even when we haven't seen it.

We also say that *"God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son."* People do a lot of research about the man named Jesus and life in 1st century Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. It can be interesting. But it doesn't change our mind about what the Bible says about Jesus Christ of Nazareth, because we believe that God's testimony is greater than man's testimony.

We would also say that *"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."* And when you say God is a liar, than you have to look for the truth somewhere else. And how we look and look and look, but never find! We get a lot of opinions. We get a lot of research and some of it is very valuable and support our understanding of what the text of the Bible is telling us, helping us to understand the facts and the illustrations and the culture and the geography. But what is at stake is the Truth of the Trinity, which is on trial every day. What is at Stake is the Truth of our Eternal Life beyond our birth and death on the Planet Earth.

II. This Trial Has at Stake Eternal Life

"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." It is a simple mathematical equation isn't it? Son of God = life; no Son of God = no life. You see our one God, three persons who are one in power and majesty working together to save you and me. God loved you so much he sent his Son. The Son willingly took our place in life and in death. The Spirit provides the testimony about what the Father has done through 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 . . ."*

What a debt of gratitude we owe to our Triune God. Without him we would grow older day after day and face the grave with nothing but fear and hopelessness, expecting that the failure of our bodies will take us away from God's blessing forever. Or we would face each day with fear, not knowing whether disease or accident or crime will take us away from God's blessing forever. God has taken away the fear through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. *"This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life."*

Thank God, the Father, for his great love, that he did not want to see the people that he created be lost forever in hell along with that rebellious angel Satan and his followers. Thank God the Son for enduring the suffering and the temptation and the punishment and the rejection and the death for you so that you can face the end of your life with confidence that you will never have to face any evil again. Thank God the Holy Spirit for planting the words of the testimony into your heart, for transforming you so that you know and you believe that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God and the Son of Man, your Savior.

Conclusion – Although we struggle to understand who God is, how he exists in a life that is so different from our own, still we proclaim him one God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the Creator of all physical life and the Wonderful Giver of Eternal Life. This testimony is in your hearts today. But the Holy Spirit has not worked in the hearts of everyone. So we pray on this day that the Holy Spirit would plant faith in the Triune God in the hearts of many more, through our ministry here at Woodlawn, through the truth of God's Word that you speak to those around you, through the ministry of our church and all Christians around the world.

This world will not last. It is temporary. We need to be in position to overcome the world and we need to do everything humanly possible to bring others into the same position. *"⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."* Come, Holy Spirit and use your people to testify to the truth of the Trinity. Amen.