

Who Do You Believe?

1 John 5:6-13

This week I read a story from *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno about his immigrant mother. It seems that she lived in constant fear of deportation. On the citizenship test, you can miss up to four questions. She missed five. The question she missed was "*What is the Constitution of the United States?*" Her answer was "*A boat.*" She wasn't entirely wrong. The *USS Constitution* was docked in Boston. However the judge instantly denied her citizenship. Leno's father stormed up to the judge asking, "*What is this? Let me see the test! She's not wrong. The Constitution is a boat!*" The judge rolled his eyes and said, "*No sir, the Constitution is our basic governing document*" "*It's also a boat in Boston,*" Leno's father raved, "*the Constitution! Same thing! Come on!*" The judge finally relented, "*Fine,*" he said, "*she's a citizen. Now get out of here!*" Proudly Leno's dad said to his mom, "*I fixed it. You passed.*" "*No, I didn't pass,*" she whimpered. "*They're going to come after me!*" The famous comedian writes, "*From then on, any time my mother was even in the proximity of a policeman, she quaked with fear. When I took her to Scotland in 1983, she asked me, 'Will I be able to get back in?' 'Ma! Don't worry! That was 50 years ago!' However her doubts never ended.*"

Many Christians struggle with their salvation in the same way Jay Leno's mother struggled with her citizenship: they never feel secure. Some Christians doubt their salvation and are never really sure that God has made them "accepted in the beloved."

Now as you know, the philosophy of our modern (or some say post-modern) world is that nothing is certain, everything is relative. We are told we cannot know anything for sure. The world tells us, "What might be true for you might not be true for me."

Yet strangely enough, often very same people who promote this kind of philosophy turn around and accuse Christians of exercising what they call "blind faith," that is, faith without any basis in fact. They say that we simply choose to believe in God without any reasonable evidence for it. They say to us, rather condescendingly at times, "I would love to believe like you do, but I simply cannot."

I hope you recognize that all of this argument is so much hogwash. The whole genius of the Christian faith is that it rests upon facts. These facts are imbedded in the record of the human race and spelled out in the pages of scripture. John, as he comes now to the close of this letter, quickly surveys for us the evidence for our faith. He declares why it is that we believe in whom we believe.

This passage is written to dispel our doubts and give us assurance. In fact, in v.13 John says you can "**know that you have eternal life.**" We can be sure of our salvation.

How Can We know our Salvation is Certain (vv.6-13)?

Regarding salvation and assurance, someone has pointed out that there are three groups of people: (1) *those who are secure but not sure*; (2) *those who are "sure" but not secure*; and (3) *those who are secure and sure*. John want us to be in the last group.

John declares in this text, there are three witnesses. Two of them are external and historical, and one of them is internal and personal; but all three are intricately related together, forming a marvelous fabric of testimony that is extremely powerful.

A. **The Testimony of the Three Witnesses** (vv.6-8).

John says that "**He**," that is, Jesus "**came by water and blood... not only by water, but by water and blood.**" He adds "**And it is the Spirit who bears witness.**" We have three that testify of Jesus, the WATER, the BLOOD and the SPIRIT.

The symbolism of the water and blood and the fact that much of v.7 doesn't appear in any of the ancient manuscripts makes this difficult, but not impossible to interpret correctly.

1. The Testimony of the Water (v. 6)

Let's begin with "**the water.**" What water? I read a lot of commentaries from many Bible scholars this week as I studied this text. There were various ideas about the meaning water in this verse, because John does not spell it out directly for us. Here are a couple of those ideas:

- The water is the Word of God, as Paul uses the term in Ephesians 5:26 where he writes about Jesus cleansing His church "**with the washing of water by the word.**"
- The water is that which John saw and recorded in his gospel at the death of Jesus when, "**one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out**" (John 19:34).

I believe the "**water**" of which John speaks of is the water at the baptism of Jesus. It is the water of the Jordan River. Let's go back and read **Mt.3:13-17.**

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Two extraordinary things happened at Jesus' baptism. First, the Spirit of God came upon Christ in the form of a dove. And second, the voice of the Father spoke from heaven, "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**"

Baptism was a picture of repentance. John baptized people who had turned from their sins and turned to God. Jesus didn't have any sin, but He was baptized because it was "**fitting... to fulfill all righteousness**" (3:15). It was good to do all that God required. Jesus was baptized even

when He did not need to be as an example to us to do all God requires.

"**The water**" then is a symbol of Jesus sinlessness. The only way Jesus could pay the price for our sins was if He had no sin. Jesus was not baptized because He needed it to be made righteous; He was baptized because He was already righteous.

2. The Testimony of the Blood.

"**The blood**" represents the Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus' sinlessness in itself could not save us. A sinless life is insufficient to save us. We cannot simply follow Jesus' example of a sinless life. To look at the spotless, stainless life of the Son of God is the most condemning thing I know. It shames me, it discourages me. I could never approach that kind of living, and I do not know anyone else who can. No, faith requires something else. It requires an atoning death, it requires blood.

Jesus' sinless life led Him to a sacrificial death. On the cross, the Sinless One bore the sins of all humanity. John has already told us Jesus is "**the propitiation for our sins.**" (1 John 2:2).

1 Pet.1:19 says we were redeemed "**with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.**"

The "**water**" represents the baptism, the sinless life of Christ. The "**blood**" represents the cross, the sacrificial death of Christ. These two events mark the beginning and end of our Lord's public ministry on earth: the water of baptism at the beginning, the blood of the cross at the end. Christ, himself, is the centering ground of Christian faith. This is always true. It is Jesus Christ himself who is the supreme fact upon which our Christian faith rests.

The third testimony is "**the Spirit who bears witness.**"

3. The Testimony of the Spirit.

The water and the blood are historical, objective and intellectual evidences. But beyond these two historical evidences, John says, there lies yet a third: that mysterious, subjective, yet powerfully compelling evidence of the witness of the Spirit within.

Wherever the gospel is preached, be it with great eloquence to a stadium with thousands of people or across the table at Burger King, the Spirit of God works in the heart. The Spirit helps us realize not only did Jesus die for the world but He died for me!

We know the gospel is true objectively because of the objective historical accuracy of the Word of God, but also because of the subjective personal activity of the Spirit of God. He CONVICTS us of our sin. He CONVINCES us of the truth of Christ. When we do receive Jesus, He COMFORTS us with assurance. John says "**the Spirit is truth**" (v.6). Rom.8:16 says, "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**"

I know I am secure in my salvation because of the "**water and blood.**" I

am convinced that Jesus lived a sinless life and died a sacrificial death. Furthermore, I am even more convinced because I know "**the Spirit**" of God has come into my life. In v.8 John says "**these three agree as one.**"

John Newton, who wrote so many of our hymns, the most famous of which is Amazing Grace, was for many years of his life a reckless, degenerate reprobate, living the wildest sort of life as he worked in the slave trade. With his health ruined, he was on a voyage back to England from Africa when, in the midst of a storm, God spoke to his heart and he found the Christ he had long rejected. He became one of the outstanding spokesmen of the gospel of his day, and he put his own testimony in these simple words.

In evil long I took delight
Unawed by shame or fear
Until a new object met my sight
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree
In agony and blood
Who fixed his languid eyes on me
As near His cross I stood.

Sure, never till my latest breath
Will I forget that look
It seemed to charge me with His death
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience owned and felt my guilt
And plunged me in despair
I saw my sins His blood had spilt
And served to nail Him there.

A second look He gave
Which said, "I freely all forgive.
My blood was for thy ransom paid
I died that thou may'st live."

That is it, you see. That is the witness of the Spirit, that personalizing of the work of the cross that makes it come home to the individual in power. When the word of pardon is believed, the Spirit also gives a wonderful sense of forgiveness, a lifting of the burden of guilt, the sense of washing away of sins, and the peace of God is spoken to a guilty heart.

B. **The Testimony of the Father** (vv.9-12).

1. John says, "**If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.**" We all rely on the word or testimony of other people, even total strangers. How many of you trust a pharmacist that you don't know from

Adam to give you the right prescription? How many trust an unknown mechanic to make your car safe?

2. How would you feel if someone said, "**I'm trying to believe you**" or "**I wish I could trust you?**" You'd be angry because in effect to question your reliability means he believes you are a liar.

3. In v.10, John says "**He who does not believe God has made Him a liar.**" God has given "**the testimony**" of His Son and if we do not believe, we insult God and call Him "**a liar.**"

4. John says that the person who "**believes in the Son has the witness in himself.**" When we believe the truth and apply the truth we will experience the truth. Until I believe what the salesman tells me about a new car and apply what he said by buying it, I don't get to experience the pleasure of owning it.

5. When I believe the Scripture and try to practically apply that truth to my everyday experience, the Holy Spirit lifts the words from the pages of the Bible and helps me see them fleshed out in my own life. The process is always BELIEVE, APPLY, EXPERIENCE.

6. What is the Father's "**testimony?**" V.11 says, "**And this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.**" God has not merely given us life in quantity but in quality, not merely life eternal but life abundant!

7. If I asked you, "**What is eternal life?**" many would say, "**I will go to heaven when I die.**" That's only part of it.

8. Jesus said in Jn.17:3, "**And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**" Eternal life is the knowledge of and fellowship with Almighty God through His Son Jesus Christ. Eternal life is not just a fact to be believed, but a person to be known! Eternal life is not something you will get then, it is something you have now.

9. Note v.12, "**He who has the Son HAS [not 'will have someday'] life.**" If you are saved, you ALREADY have eternal life.

This is the testimony. God has given us something, and it is wrapped up in a person, the Son of God. If you have received the Son, you have his life - - manifested, of course, by the things John has been talking about in this letter: righteousness, truth, and love. If you have not received the Son of God, no matter how earnest you are, no matter how devoted you have been, no matter how religiously intent you have been, seeking to do everything you could think of to please God, if you do not have the Son, you do not have life. That is the issue, is it not? Either you have him, or you do not have him; either you know Jesus Christ, or you do not know him. There is no middle ground, it is one or the other.

I love the dairy producers' commercial of the guy in the body cast whose hospital roommate gives him a hot chocolate chip cookie. He sees the pitcher of ice cold milk but is in terrible torment because he can't get to it. Talk about hell! The

slogan simply says, "**Got milk?**" V.12 can be summed up with the question, "**Got Jesus?**"

10. My wife and I were married over 25 years ago in Colorado Springs. Somewhere there is a record of that on a Marriage certificate, although I have not able to find it for the last few years. But we have more proof that we are married, that proof is found in our relationship. Many Christians doubt their salvation because all they have is a record. I know I am married because I have a record at the courthouse. However, if the only thing your marriage consists of is a certificate, you have a pretty miserable marriage. The relationship gives life to the record.

C. **The Testimony of the Word** (v.13).

1. John says that he has "**written to you who believe**" that is he has written to Christians so that "**you may know that you have eternal life.**".

2. If you have believed on Jesus and are applying eternal life in your fellowship with Him, you will "**know that you have eternal life**" and you will "**continue to believe.**" The old hymn says, "**You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart!**"

Would you now believe the witness of the Spirit, the water and the blood? Would you right now search your heart and listen to the Voice of His calling...He is calling you right now. If you simply call out to the Father in the Name of His Son and admit that you have first and foremost sinned against God, and that you desire not to continue in that rebellious and disobedient direction anymore, if you call out and ask the Father for the gift of faith and the power to repent, He will draw you into His heart and come to live within you. Dear friend you will be changed forever more. You will have His presence, power and peace, along with a new heart full of new desires, passions and choices. Your mind will be renewed, not by some self help book, but by the indwelling Spirit of God. You will indeed be thinking upon new things as you now begin to walk in a new direction, hand in hand and heart in heart with Him who has loved you from the beginning.