

Word One Bible Study

The Testimony of God

by Tim Schermbeck

Text: 1 John 5:9-15 for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, Lectionary Series B

1 John 5:9-15

⁹We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have 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. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever 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. ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

This passage from 1 John expresses the fundamental truth about salvation: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." However, it also provides guidance in how that truth affects us every single day. This study will explore the idea of God's "testimony" to us, the means of salvation He has provided, and what we do because we live in His grace.

The Testimony of God

First, let's take a look at the idea of God's "testimony." What (or who) do you think of when you hear the word testimony? What images pop into your head? Maybe you think of public accounts of religious conversion, stories of dramatic, life-altering moments. Or do you imagine eye-witness evidence presented in a courtroom? Neither is really the wrong picture of the word "testimony" as it is used in verse 9, but we need both images to get a proper view of what Paul means by "the testimony of God."

Open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 and 2 Timothy 1:7-9. Paul talks about his testimony about Christ. What is that testimony? Read 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 for a very direct answer. How is that testimony confirmed – how is it proven true?

*Paul's testimony is that Jesus is Lord and Savior, or rather that he is **the** Lord and Savior. Paul is human, so his is human testimony, but it is proven true through the work of the Holy Spirit – enriching God's people, providing them with wisdom and every spiritual gift.*

Now read John 5:31-40. Jesus says that "there is another who testifies in [Jesus'] favor." Who is Jesus talking about? What are the two ways that this "other" testifies about who Jesus is?

Jesus is talking about His – and our – Father. For thousands of years, God had testified through His Word about the Savior who was to come. God also gave Jesus works to do that testified to who Jesus was and is. His miracles, His preaching and the saving work He carried out through His death and resurrection demonstrated Jesus' power as true God and His love for His people.

Next read Acts 14:15-17. Paul and Barnabas tell the crowd that God has left “testimony about himself.” What is this testimony? What does it reveal about God?

The testimony Paul specifically names is the kindness God has shown in providing rain needed to produce crops, in supplying plenty of food and filling the hearts of the people with joy. God's grace is present in every land, among every people, in all corners of creation, and this grace stands as His testimony.

So: The hand of the Lord at work is God's testimony to His own greatness and grace. The Word of the Lord – the Bible – is also God's testimony to us about Himself and about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of believers confirms the truth: Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the source of all life. In other words, the testimony of God is, well, God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – at work in the world. John is emphasizing Jesus' work in the world, the work that gives us eternal life.

Whoever has the Son has Life

Reread v. 12. John writes not only that all who have the Son – all who believe – have life, but also that those who do not believe do not have life. This is a hard truth. Who do you know who does not have the Son? What is your first reaction to John's declaration that they do not have life?

Read John 3:16-18 and John 3:36. How is the message of these two passages – and of 1 John 5:12 – a message of good news?

Whoever believes in Jesus will live! What better news is there? No matter how great your sin, no matter how far away from God you have lived, Christ restores your relationship with Him through faith. Now, as for the hard truth in these verses – that those who do not believe will not be saved – we're not going to abandon that truth. Keep thinking about the people you know who do not know Christ, those friends and family who do not have the Son.

We Have What We Asked of Him

Why does John write about this testimony? Look at verse 13. Did those John wrote to already “know” that they had received the gift of eternal life? Do you know? What does it mean to know?

Read John 6:68-69, John 19:35, and 2 Timothy 1:12. Knowing and believing are not just related ideas; they seem to be nearly synonymous. Why do faith and certainty go together? Read Hebrews 11:1 for a more direct statement about this.

Before you answer, read Ephesians 1:16-18 and 2:8. Where does our faith – and our certainty – come from? So, why do faith and certainty go together?

Faith is certainty without proof. While this doesn't mean that faithful people never doubt, it does mean that the Holy Spirit will not leave us. Because the Holy Spirit does the heavy lifting when it comes to working faith in us, we live in the security and certainty of our salvation. We know God because He knows us. And while we may waiver, God never does.

Okay, so what? What does this confidence do for us, or rather in us? Reread vv. 14-15. Whatever we ask of God, we can be confident that we have what we have asked of Him. 1 John 5 is not the only place in Scripture that we read this promise. Read John 14:12-14 and John 15:16. Jesus promises to do whatever we ask in His name. So what do we ask for? Think about the hard truth from the passages in John you read earlier.

Jesus makes His promise to do whatever we ask in His name when He is preparing His disciples for the work they will do after He has gone. He sends them to bear fruit that will last and then promises to do whatever we ask for in His name. Certainly we can ask for His grace and kindness to be poured out in the physical sustenance we know He provides, in the lives of His people. But we can ask for so much more. We can ask for His Spirit to work through us in the lives of those who don't know Christ. We can ask for our testimony to help others see the ways God's testimony is present in the world. We can approach Him with confidence, knowing that He hears us.

Close in Prayer