

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:6-9

The Testimony of God

INTRODUCTION

As we transition into the heart of 1 John 5, remember that this chapter is the conclusion of the core message of the letter. In this chapter, we have a wide variety of topics, including overcoming, assurance, belief, testimony, and eternal life. The author, an apostle who witnessed Jesus firsthand, continues his fatherly rhetoric and uses layered repetition to engage the minds of the children (teknion) and have them align with Apostolic truth. The pinnacle of this chapter focuses on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the promise of eternal life.

Last lesson, we worked our way through verses 4-5, addressing “overcome” and “victory.”

- The Greek terms for “overcome” and “victory” (νικάω, νίκη, νίκος) are used repeatedly in 1 John 5:4-5 to highlight spiritual triumph.
- This victory is not achieved through personal effort or continuous action but is a completed reality for those “born of God” through faith in Jesus.
- “The faith of ours” refers to specific beliefs about Jesus as the Son of God and is central to overcoming the world.
- Victory in this context does not mean conquering earthly powers or evil, but having assurance and security in Christ because of His finished work.
- Being “overcomers” is rooted in spiritual position in Christ, rather than individual accomplishments or works.

1 JOHN 5:6-9 – THE TESTIMONY OF GOD AND MEN

1 John 5:6-11 is the testimony concerning Jesus and what God has given to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God. This testimony is in three things: the water, the blood, and the Spirit.

This whole section is to provide confidence and assurance in Jesus Christ and God, who gives eternal life to the believing ones. Verses 13-21 are escalating truths. This moves from we know that we have eternal life, to He hears us, to intercession, to not being “touched” by the evil one, to truth in understanding, and finally keeping away from idols.

Verses 13-21 are built from the doctrine of verses 5-12; therefore, we need to be sure of what this section teaches and how this information affects the assurance of the believer. Therefore, we need to be sure what this says with the best understanding possible.

Before we look at the testimony of God and men, let’s discuss a textual problem. In the King James Version, and a few others, there is a phrase added in verse 7: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

“The KJV includes it only because that translation was based on a recension dependent on the third edition of Erasmus’s Greek text; Erasmus included the verse to fulfill a wager, protested it in a note, and withdrew it in subsequent editions of the text.” Bible Background Commentary

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The longer phrasing first appeared as a marginal note in some Latin manuscripts around the fourth-fifth century, possibly as a theological gloss or interpretation to emphasize the Trinity during debates like the Arian controversy. It gradually entered the Latin Vulgate text by the 9th century, but was absent from Greek manuscripts until much later.

The text is absent from all Greek manuscripts before the 14th century (earliest full appearance in Codex Montfortianus, ca. 1520; others are marginal notes from the 10th-16th centuries).

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), a Dutch scholar, compiled the first printed Greek New Testament (*Novum Instrumentum omne*) in 1516, which became foundational for the *Textus Receptus*—the Greek text underlying the KJV and other Reformation-era translations.

Erasmus excluded longer text from his first (1516) and second (1519) editions because it was missing from the Greek manuscripts he consulted. He defended this by noting its presence only in the Latin Vulgate, suspecting it was a Latin addition.

Critics, including Catholic scholars like Edward Lee and Diego López de Zúñiga, accused him of undermining Trinitarian doctrine. Erasmus reportedly stated (in a response to Lee) that if a Greek manuscript containing the Comma were found, he would include it. Shortly after, Codex Montfortianus (minuscule 61, dated around 1520) appeared with the text, and I suspected that it was possibly created or altered for this purpose, as its Greek text suspiciously matches the Latin Vulgate.

He added the suspect to his third edition but included a lengthy footnote expressing his doubts, calling the manuscript suspicious and suggesting it was back-translated from Latin.

The inclusion was due to the challenge or and most regard its inclusion due to Erasmus having an "unguarded moment" promise, not a literal wager.

Erasmus' quote – "Although I hardly know whether it was done by chance that in this place it does not repeat what is in our Greek texts, 'and the three are in one.' From this British codex, therefore, we have restored what was said to be lacking in ours, lest there be any opportunity for slandering. Although I suspect that the codex was corrected to match ours. I consulted two Latin codices of marvelous antiquity in the library of St. Donatian at Bruges. Neither had the testimony of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. And not even 'on earth' was added in the other. It only had: 'And there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.'"

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Verse 6 translates nearly word-for-word. Verses 6-8 are not in contention as to the translation, but the meaning of these verses is highly contested.

1. In general, John states that there are three who witness/testify
 - a. Water
 - b. Blood
 - c. Spirit
2. These three must be obvious
3. These three must testify about Jesus Christ
4. These three are better witnesses than the witnesses of men
5. These three are from God
6. These three are to assure eternal life
7. These three are to convince the observer about the Son, to believe in the Son

The word “**μαρτυρέω** *martureō* - verb” and “**μαρτυρία** *marturia* - noun” are the words for testify and testimony in 1 John. Combined, they are used ten times from 6-10. Both are legal terms. To give testimony is not just talk but official witnesses in a court setting. In classical Greek, this word was used for courts, moral viewpoints, of philosophical discussion.

The sense of the word is that a person is not just telling someone what happened but is both factual and provable. This is not an argument from rationalism but deals with empirical data. The audience would be able to investigate the claims and see that the witness is true.

Why is this written? We need to remember that the person of Jesus is under attack in this setting (2:22, 4:1-3). To provide the truth to this readership, John provides first a witness from the Apostles and himself (1:1-3, 4:14). John uses these two words more than any other writer combined. In the Gospel of John, the noun is used fourteen times, the verb is used 33 times (John 1:7-8, 32-34, 19:35, 21:24-25). John uses these words as a historical testimony and restates this in His letter to convince the reader concerning the person of Jesus Christ (acts and events). This word continues to be used in Revelation as well (Rev 1:1-3, 7-11, 19:10). Truly, the testimony and to testify is the idea behind John’s writings.

What is the water and the blood and the spirit?

What is the water?

For this question, there are two plausible answers: the first is that the testimony of water is about His physical birth, the second is that this refers to His baptism.

The reference to water is seen as Jesus' physical birth, symbolizing human birth through amniotic fluid and affirming His true incarnation. In this conservative biblical view, "by water and blood" highlights Jesus' full humanity from birth to death, refuting claims that deny His physical existence. Water signifies His human entry into the world, alongside the

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blood (His death) and Spirit (divine confirmation), forming a complete testimony of His identity.

In John 1:14, it emphasizes Jesus' incarnation, where the Word became flesh, referring to His birth. The water in 1 John 5 could symbolize this entry into fleshly existence through birth, as a testimony that He was truly "made flesh" and not a mere spiritual apparition.

John 3:4-6 – This provides a key parallel in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Here, being "born of water" is linked to natural, fleshly birth (as Nicodemus references the mother's womb), distinct from spiritual birth. Jesus Himself "came by water" in His own physical birth, testifying to His humanity and the reality of His Messiahship.

Galatians 4:4 – Being "born of a woman" highlights Jesus' physical birth through a human mother, involving the natural process of water in childbirth.

Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:6-7 - This physical delivery aligns with the water of birth, testifying to Jesus' humble, fleshly arrival.

In 1 Timothy 3:16, the manifestation in flesh begins at birth.

This framework sees the water of physical birth as a testimony because it confirms Jesus' genuine humanity from the start, essential for His role as Savior (Hebrews 2:14-17). Without this birth witness, the blood of His death loses grounding in human solidarity, and the Spirit's testimony lacks a fleshly foundation. The three agree in affirming Jesus as both fully human (water and blood) and divine (Spirit), countering docetic heresies implied in 1 John.

Alternatively, the "water" can plausibly refer to Jesus' baptism as a public inauguration of His ministry. This event serves as a testimony because it was a revelation of His identity as the Son of God, with the Spirit descending and the Father's voice affirming Him. Jesus came "by water," meaning His messianic mission was initially validated at His baptism.

John 1:31-34 – Here, the water of baptism is explicitly a witness to Jesus' identity, with the Spirit providing visible confirmation and the voice

Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-1, Luke 21:22 – The water here is the medium of baptism, with the Spirit and Father's voice as witnesses.

This understanding views the water as baptism because it publicly declared Jesus as the Son and Messiah at the outset of His ministry. This fits well because it is what the apostles witnessed (Acts 1:21-22). The verification of the witness of God is the apostles. Although Matthew writes about the birth, the apostles were not there to be a firsthand witness.

Both the birth and baptism are viable explanations for the testimony of water, but I believe that the baptism (being in all four accounts) is more likely of the intent of the writing.

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The *blood* indicates the final days of his life. Blood is both literal in reference to death as well as figurative speaking of His sacrifice. The events of the cross are well documented (the seven sayings, the darkness, the earthquake). The supernatural activity at the cross is evident to a witness of God.

The usage of "πνεῦμα" (pneuma, "spirit") in 1 John 5:6-8 aligns with a pattern established throughout the epistle, particularly in 3:24-4:6 and 4:13, where it denotes not the person or indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit but the revelatory message, utterance, or doctrine that the Holy Spirit provides through apostolic testimony.

In 1 John 4:1-6, "The spirit that he gave to us" refers to the utterance, revelation, and the message that God has given through the Holy Spirit." This is tied to apostolic revelation: "Because of the revelation of God through the Apostles, as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance." Lexically, πνεῦμα (which can mean "breath," "wind," or figuratively "utterance" or "inspired message" in contexts of revelation) is nuanced here as content, not presence. The relative pronoun "ὅς" (hos, "which/who") is translated as "which" to avoid implying personhood, reinforcing that it points to the message.

Recalling 1 John 4:1-6, "spirit" is used nine times (including 3:24) where we concluded that 'Spirit' refers to the utterances inspired by a spirit." This is explicitly the "doctrine, truth" given by the Holy Spirit to the apostles, contrasted with Satan's "doctrine that has gone out into the world." Testing the spirits (4:1) means "evaluate the message to see who is really speaking, who is behind the message." False prophets promote a "false message," while the "spirit of God" is "every message that is founded upon the truth of Jesus Christ." In 4:6, this culminates in the "spirit of truth" (πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) versus "spirit of error," where the spirit is the apostolic message that believers use to discern.

This pattern shows "πνεῦμα" consistently as the Holy Spirit's mediated message—revelatory content about Jesus Christ—rather than the Spirit's direct person or indwelling. In 5:6-8, where "πνεῦμα" appears in a testimony context, the same usage applies: the spirit testifies as the message provided by the Holy Spirit.

Grammatically, *water* (ὕδωρ) and *blood* (αἷμα) are events (Jesus' baptism and crucifixion, per context), not persons; thus, "πνεῦμα" fits as content (message) rather than person, unifying the historical events into doctrinal truth.

1 John 1:1-3 – The author grounds the message in what was seen and heard by the apostles, emphasizing their firsthand, written testimony as Spirit-inspired.

2 Peter 1:21 – Prophecy (or scripture) comes from people carried along by the Holy Spirit, tying the Spirit directly to the written word.