



"If you are drawn into a controversy, use very hard arguments and very soft words."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

**24-Aug-18**

## **The Three Witnesses of Christ (Part One)**

Years ago, I had a discussion with a man whom I had known for quite some time, so we generally knew where the other stood on various religious topics. The conversation involved whether God's law was still in effect and what place it should hold in the lives of Christians. My friend's assertion was that what really mattered—what was most important—was loving [God](#). He was not entirely against God's law, but he saw it as much less important than loving God. As long as a person loved God, he argued, everything else would work out.

I could agree with his statement, but I pointed out that it depended on what was meant by the word "[love](#)." We had a Bible out, so I suggested that he turn to [I John 5:2-3](#) to see the basic biblical definition of love: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

After reading these verses, he said, "Huh." I could almost see the wheels turning in his mind. Then he said, "I like to read verses in their context, so I am going to read some more." So he began reading I John 5 from the

beginning, but at verse 7, the whole conversation changed. [1 John 5:7](#) is that very controversial verse that reads—in some Bibles: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."

Suddenly, the issues of love and commandment-keeping were forgotten. He said, "Now wait a minute. I know you don't believe in the [Trinity](#), yet here it is, spelled out plainly in the Bible." So we discussed the King James Version of the Bible, the original Greek manuscripts, interlinear Bibles, and a presumptuous monk who inserted a significant falsehood into the New Testament.

Significantly, this controversy overshadowed a foundational truth. That is, the fact that love and obedience to God are intrinsically joined was crowded out by an obvious copyist's error, what is called an interpolation. Any degree of research shows plainly that words were added, yet these spurious words still have the effect of drawing attention away from what is actually being said. Even for those of us in the church, it is easy to focus on the issue of added words rather than on what the apostle John truly meant.

So, controversy aside, what is the actual meaning of [1 John 5:7-8](#)? Ironically enough, these verses reveal something quite opposed to the concept of "one God existing in three Persons."

When we remove the spurious words, [1 John 5:5-8](#) reads:

Who is he who overcomes [the world](#), but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He who came by water and blood—[Jesus Christ](#); not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

John says that the Spirit, the water, and the blood bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Greek word translated "bear witness" ("bear record," KJV) is *martureo*, from which we derive our English word "martyr." This verb describes the action of someone who witnesses, testifies, gives evidence, or gives an honest report that something happened or is true.

These three things—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—together provide evidence of who Jesus Christ was and is.

These three witnesses can be explained through the eyes and words of the man who wrote this epistle. The apostle John is unique in that he penned one of [the gospel](#) accounts as well as later epistles. He was an eyewitness to the very things that he says "bear witness." We will let John explain himself.

The witness of water is found in the first chapter of John's gospel, in the account of Jesus Christ's [baptism](#):

Now this is the testimony of John [the Baptist], when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" . . . And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." . . . The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the [sin](#) of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness [*martureo*], saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified [*martureo*] that this is the Son of God." ([John 1:19](#), 25-27, 29-34)

This account describes the "water" that Jesus Christ came by—the water of His own baptism. John the Baptist says twice that he testified that he knew that Jesus was the Son of God because of the spectacular events surrounding this baptism. The other gospel writers tell of the voice from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," but only the apostle John records the testimony of the man who was right there.

Even though the Holy Spirit appears here, and the Spirit seems to be the identifying sign, the sequence of events is that *first* John baptized Jesus and *then* he saw the Spirit descending on Him. The Spirit descending was the visual indicator, but it was the baptism—and all the events surrounding it—that caused John to bear this witness.

Consider Christ's baptism. Did He need to be baptized? Did He need to be washed clean of sin? Certainly not. His baptism was for our benefit; it was meant to set an example for us. Jesus was not the first person to be baptized, but He was the first—and only—One baptized who did not need it for Himself! He went through this ceremony to show us what *we* should do. The ritual of baptism is a symbol—and a public profession—of the covenant relationship with God, just as Christ's baptism witnessed to everyone present that He had an extraordinary relationship with God.

Next time, we will look into the other witnesses, the Spirit and the blood.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[The Wonderful Ordinance of Water Baptism](#)**

by Martin G. Collins

There is a correct process for baptism, leading to conversion, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, overcoming, and sanctification. Noah's rescue from the flood and the Exodus through the Red Sea are types of baptism. John the Baptizer received his understanding of the ordinance and principle of baptism from his parents, emphasizing repentance, belief, and faith, as well as keeping God's laws, bearing fruits of repentance. When God calls us, there is an irrevocable contract, committing ourselves to a lifetime of overcoming, counting the cost, and forsaking all, following the example of Jesus Christ, becoming living sacrifices, totally relying on God for our strength. In the great commission to the church, Jesus commands baptism into God's Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes a burial and resurrection from a grave, or the crucifixion of the old man or carnal self. After a person realizes his ways

have been wrong, turning from his own ways, repenting of his sins, wanting to follow Christ, and wanting to become a child of God, he should counsel for baptism.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Does I John 5:7-8 Support the Trinity Doctrine?](#)**

by Martin G. Collins

The passage in I John 5:7-8 appears to be a clear proof of the Trinity, the belief that God is made up of three Beings in one. There is just one major problem: The Trinitarian language is not original to the text. Martin Collins provides evidence from both the context of I John and recent scholarship that words were inserted long after John wrote his epistle.

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