



"Holiness requires continual effort on our part and continual nourishing and strengthening by the Spirit."

—Jerry Bridges

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The Three Witnesses of Christ (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, the apostle John was the only gospel writer to record John the Baptist's threefold testimony—of the water (covered in the last essay), the blood, and the Spirit. Significantly, he was also the only one to record the pouring out of Jesus Christ's blood. Notice [John 19:33-37](#):

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he [John] who has seen has testified [*martureo*], and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." [See [Exodus 12:46](#); [Numbers 9:12](#); [Psalm 34:20](#)] And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." [See [Zechariah 12:10](#)]
]

John testifies that, because of what he saw, he knew perfectly well who the Romans crucified on that awful day. He knew prophecy was being fulfilled right before his eyes. John says explicitly that he witnessed this and recorded it so that we might believe even as he did.

Jesus allowed His blood to be spilled for us. It was the price He was willing to pay to purchase the church of [God](#) ([Acts 20:28](#)). But for what purpose? Christ paid the price to redeem the [firstfruits](#) of His creation ([James 1:18](#); [Revelation 14:4](#)). What creation? The answer takes us back to the beginning, when One member of the God Family said to the Other, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" ([Genesis 1:26](#)). Christ's blood purchased the lives of those whom God is creating in His image. Right now, this divine work primarily involves the church, but eventually, it will encompass all humanity.

John's final witness of Christ's Messiahship is the Holy Spirit. We saw an application of this in John 1, where John the Baptist describes the Spirit descending on Jesus, but in [John 15:26-27](#), the apostle records another incident that demonstrates this witness: "But when [the Helper](#) comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify [*martureo*] of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

John records Jesus saying that the Holy Spirit will testify of Him. Trinitarians trumpet [John 15:26](#) as proof that the Holy Spirit must be a person—because only a person could testify. However, this same Greek word is rendered as "bear witness" in [I John 5:7](#), where it reads, "For there are three that bear witness." It is just like saying that "there are three that testify." Nobody would claim that the water or the blood are persons, yet they bear witness or testify just as the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit does not have to speak to testify. The *presence* of the Holy Spirit in an individual testifies or makes a witness in the same way the presence of Christ's blood, spilling onto the ground, made a silent witness to John.

Christ is saying that, when the disciples received the Holy Spirit, its presence would make a witness of who Christ is because Christ would then be dwelling in them through that Spirit ([II Corinthians 6:16](#); [Galatians 2:20](#)).

The presence of God's Spirit would testify of God, not necessarily by any spoken word, but by the evidence of a changed life.

Christ says a similar thing just before His ascension to the Father, telling the disciples in [Acts 1:8](#) that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be witnesses of Him to the ends of the earth. [Galatians 5:22-23](#) tells us that when someone has the Holy Spirit, his or her life will produce evidence in the form of [love](#), [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), [faithfulness](#), gentleness, and [self-control](#). A life bearing the [fruit of the Spirit](#) is impossible to hide. Such a life will be a more effective testimony than anything spoken in front of a judge or jury.

Why did John single out these three things—the water, the blood, and the Spirit? Consider what He could have mentioned, but did not. He did not remark on the virgin birth or on Jesus' ancestry, nor did he refer to the many [Old Testament](#) prophecies Christ fulfilled or the miracles He performed. John even failed to bring up the only sign that Christ Himself offered to prove that He was the Messiah: that He would be a full [three days and three nights](#) in the grave ([Matthew 12:40](#)).

Certainly, all these are "witnesses" that prove who Christ was, but what John singles out are three things to which each of *us* can personally relate. These three witnesses are significant, not only because they identify the firstborn Son of God ([Romans 8:29](#); [Colossians 1:15](#), 18; [Hebrews 1:6](#); [12:23](#); [Revelation 1:5](#)), but also because they identify *all* the sons of God! They do not apply in the exact same way, but they do apply.

- Jesus set the example in being baptized—immersed in water—even though He had no [sin](#) of which to [repent](#), signaling that water [baptism](#) should be our first step in the process of coming to know God.
- Christ comes before God's throne by the blood of His own perfect sacrifice, but we cannot do so because we cannot qualify as a perfect sacrifice. However, we can appear before the Father through Christ's blood covering our sins.
- Just as Christ foretold that His disciples would receive the Holy Spirit (after His blood atoned for their sins), so we also receive God's Spirit

after we have been washed clean and justified by Christ's blood. The same Spirit that testified in the lives of the disciples, pointing to God's work in them, will likewise testify in our lives.

In Part Three, we will consider [I John 5:6-7](#) in the context of the apostle John's teaching to God's elect.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Talking Blood \(1994\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

I John 5:6 teaches that blood is a witness. Blood atonement, referenced 427 times in the Bible, dramatically magnifies the seriousness God places on the consequences of sin. Only blood can atone for sin (Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22). No forgiveness of sin is possible without death. We dare not minimize or trivialize the impact or consequences of our sins. Forgiveness is not a casual matter with God. The pain of seeing the mangling of His Son's body makes forgiveness a most anguishing and sobering matter. The blood of Christ, a propitiation or appeasing force, the only means to satisfy God's pure sense of justice, is a testimony of God's intense love for us. This willingness to sacrifice needs to be incorporated in our relationship with our brethren (I John 4:10-11).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Is the Holy Spirit?](#)

by David C. Grabbe

Every Christian understands what the Holy Spirit is, right? Wrong! Even long-time theologians admit in their commentaries that, in the end, the Spirit

is an incomprehensible mystery to them. David Grabbe lays out some of the reasons for their confusion, showing that, if they would only believe the Bible, they could learn the truth about God's Spirit.

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