

CHRIST ON TRIAL
1 JOHN 5:6-12

The darkest night of the disciples' lives was the night of Jesus betrayal, arrest, and trial.

They knew that Jesus was hated by many — the Pharisees and Sadducees rejected Him, Nazareth rejected Him, even His own siblings rejected Him. But to see Christ on trial and knowing of the consequences of that trial had to be a particular hardship for them. How could so many be so wrong about Christ?

Yet the trial on that Thursday night was not the last time Jesus was on trial. Ever since that day, He has been on trial every day in the hearts of men. And the essence of that trial is whether or not Christ is who He claimed to be, whether He has done what He claimed to do, and whether He is relevant.

Throughout the book of 1 John, the apostle has been compelling his readers to continue to believe in Christ; and now as the book nears completion, John strenuously repeats that theme (vv. 1, 5, 13, 20). But what must we believe about Jesus? This is what John outlines in vv. 6-12. And John's instruction focuses on the testimony that is given about Jesus (vv. 6-9) and then the two decisions that are made about Him (v. 10-12). Since the word "witness" is so prominent in this passage (it is used 10x in these verses — and only in two other places in the book), it seems as if John is patterning his discussion around the theme of a trial — what is the truth that must be believed about Jesus and what is the outcome of the verdicts?

OBTAINING ETERNAL LIFE IS DEPENDENT ON BELIEVING IN THE ETERNAL CHRIST.

1. The Witness Box: the Testimony About Christ (vv. 6-9)

- ✓ The testimony of WATER
- ✓ The testimony of BLOOD
- ✓ The testimony of the SPIRIT

2. The Jury Room: the Verdicts About Christ (vv. 10-12)

- ✓ Belief: "God is TRUE"
- ✓ Rejection: "God is a LIAR"

1. The Witness Box: the Testimony About Christ (vv. 6-9)

- One of the basic elements of a court case is when evidence is brought forward through the testimony of witnesses. Even the OT had clear instruction about how that was to be done, requiring that there be two to three witnesses for a conviction (Dt. 17:6; 19:15). This also becomes the pattern in the case of church discipline (Mt. 18:16).
- In the Ephesian church, the nature of Christ had been under attack (2:18, 22ff), so John himself submits to the requirement of a testimony of three to affirm the truth about Christ's deity.
- The testimony of WATER
 - ✓ John begins the defense of Christ by saying that He came **by water and blood** (v. 5).
 - ✓ Notice first of all that John says that Jesus **came** — not that He was born. Now He was born, but by using the term **came**, John is emphasizing His choice in coming and His heavenly origin, even as he did at the beginning of this book (1:1-2; cf. also **Jn. 1:9, 14ff**; 13:3; 16:28).
 - ✓ Now there are many interpretations of what **water** and **blood** refer to — the ordinances of baptism and communion, the water and blood that came from Jesus' side when He was stabbed with the spear on the cross, His birth and death. But the most likely is that He is talking about the baptism of Jesus and the death of Jesus. Those two events authenticated the initiation and culmination of His Messianic work — they summarize Christ's redemptive work.
 - ✓ **Water** likely refers to the baptism of Jesus because that baptism was a means by which God authenticated the person of Christ (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11). In His baptism, God affirmed Jesus and His ministry. But even more, Jesus also identified Himself with the people whom He came to save. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist who preached a baptism of repentance that meant turning from their sin and asking for God's cleansing (Mk. 1:4; Acts 13:24). Baptism became an external sign of the inward reality of a changed life. Jesus was identified with that repentance. So while Christ Himself did not need repentance, in baptism He was identified with the message of John and sinners who need salvation. Thus, His baptism (**water**) authenticates His Messianic role (He is the Savior of Israel and the world).
 - ✓ But the heretics also affirmed the baptism of Jesus — in fact, they said that was where He received His deity. So when John said Jesus came by **water**, the heretics would have been in agreement (and isn't that the way heresies often work — they do not deny all of a truth, but they embrace part of the truth and then twist it).
 - ✓ So John says there was another testimony — **blood**. John reminds the readers that Jesus did not come only by water. He also came by **blood** (which John emphasizes in the middle of verse 6).

- The testimony of BLOOD
 - ✓ The testimony of **blood** is obviously a reference to the cross. And this is where John and the heretics parted.
 - ✓ Many love Jesus the teacher (Mk. 1:22). They love Jesus the miracle worker (Jn. 6:26). They love Jesus the storyteller. They love Jesus the example. They just don't love Jesus the crucified. Because if Jesus is crucified, it means something about sin and they don't want to be told they are sinners who are in need of a Savior.
 - ✓ But the blood (crucifixion) of Christ itself testifies to the work of Christ and His person. When Christ died there were a series of miraculous events that testify to the work of Christ (**Mt. 27**):
 - When Christ was being crucified, there was a supernatural darkness that covered the land (Mt. 27:45) that indicated the wrath of God being poured out on Christ (v. 46).
 - And immediately after Christ died, the curtain in the temple that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom (indicating that God did the tearing, v. 51). Where no one but the priest could enter (and he only annually), now was accessible by all of God's people — it was a means by which God affirmed His acceptance of Christ's work.
 - And then there was an earthquake and tombs were opened and dead were resurrected and went into the city and appeared to many (vv. 52-53). These were signs of the resurrection to come and another attestation of God that He accepted Christ's death.
 - Taken together, these miracles affirmed that in the death of Christ, Jesus really was the Son of God (v. 54). And that is the testimony of the blood of Christ — it was necessary not for Jesus to die for Himself, but it was necessary for Jesus Christ, the God-Man to die for our sin.
 - ✓ And it is this very truth that the heretics in Ephesus denied and it is what is denied today — they were denying the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross (and substitution is the key doctrine of salvation — it is the gospel in one word).
 - These heretics denied their need for a Savior (1:6, 8, 10).
 - They denied the deity of Christ (2:22-23).
 - They denied the work of Christ on the cross (5:6)
 - This is the same battle today —

"From its beginning, the Christian church has had problems of this kind. There never was a time when the church was free of heresy, internal turmoil, and persecution. Today, as in John's day, the church's greatest danger comes from within the church, not without." [Beeke]

- Throughout history we have had a denial of Christ's deity and blood:
 - ... In the mid-300s, Athanasius led a movement against the Heretic Arius who denied that

Jesus was of the same substance of God (led to the Nicene Creed).

... The Counsel of Chalcedon (451) affirmed the full manhood and full deity of Christ

... Al Mohler's professor, "I'll have no talk of a bloody cross in this classroom..."

... In more recent years we have had a rejection of the necessity of Christ's death with assertions that for God to pour His wrath out on Jesus makes Him a cosmic child abuser.

... We see it frequently when people come for help and the gospel is offered and they role their eyes and say in so many words (and sometimes literally): "I need help, but leave Jesus out of it, okay?" That's exactly what the heretics in Ephesus were doing.

... "Are we having communion *again*?"

... "I get it, Jesus died for our sins; now move on..."

... All these and more are merely attempts to deny the most basic and essential works of Christ — He is the eternal God-Man and He died on the cross for the sins of men.

- ✓ Jesus came in **water** identifying with the message of repentance, and **blood**, making a way of freedom from sin possible to all who believe in Christ.

"Every time we worship, we should be self-consciously committed to the ministry of John the Baptist: 'Behold the Lamb of God!' Remarkably, even in heaven the majestically enthroned Son is the slain Lamb. We never outgrow the cross. We never get beyond the need for mediation between God and ourselves — not in this life, nor in the next." [Horton, We Believe]

- ✓ This is the testimony of the blood. There is one more witness about Christ and His work...

- The testimony of the SPIRIT

- ✓ The Spirit gave testimony of Christ during His life and ministry:

- The Spirit was involved in Jesus' conception (Mt. 1:18, 20; Lk. 1:35)
- The Spirit as involved at Jesus' baptism (Mt. 3:16)
- The Spirit ministered to Jesus at His temptation (Mk. 1:12; Lk. 4:1)
- The Spirit empowered the entire ministry of Jesus (Acts 10:38)
- The Spirit was promised by Jesus as the One who would speak of Him (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13)

- ✓ The Spirit gives testimony of Christ today through the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:16; 2 Pt. 1:20f).

- ✓ Everything that the Spirit speaks is reliable because He **is the truth**. He is the embodiment and essence of the truth (cf. 4:6).

- Now what is the significance of these three testimonies?

- ✓ There are three testimonies (and, as noted above, that fulfills the OT requirements).

- ✓ Their testimony is not just in the past, but their testimony is ongoing (they *testify* [present] v. 7).
- ✓ They are in *agreement* (v. 8). They not only are in agreement, but the sense is that they are *one*. They are completely unified in their testimony. They all speak to the same truth that Jesus is God incarnate and He came to do what we could never accomplish for ourselves.
- ✓ This agreement is in contrast to the false witnesses against Christ at His trial — they could not agree on anything against Him (Mt. 26:59-61).
- ✓ These three testimonies are further unified because they ultimately find their source in God, which is why John says in v. 9 that *the testimony of God is greater* (than the testimony of men). We accept men's testimony in a court or on a document, but many reject the testimony of God about Christ at the baptism, cross, and in the Spirit.
 - God's testimony about Christ is *greater* than the testimonies of men because of its value, dignity, certainty, and authority. God is wholly trustworthy in every word.
 - To reject the testimony of God is completely unreasonable.
 - To reject the testimony of God about Christ is unreasonable because *He has testified concerning His Son*. John is not making a circular argument; John is saying that God gave testimony about Christ and continues to do so through the Spirit and Word. God has spoken about the Son. How can we reject that? (**1 Cor. 1:26-31**)

2. The Jury Room: the Verdicts About Christ (vv. 10-12)

- Three summers ago I received a jury summons and was actually seated on a jury.
 - ✓ The prosecutor made his case all morning; we were dismissed for lunch and when we returned the defense attorney stood up and said, “the defense rests.” She made no argument about the guilt of her client, so the trial moved immediately to the sentencing phase.
 - ✓ A variety of character witnesses were called to attest to the supposed good character of this guilty man. After hearing the testimonies and the refutations by the prosecutor, the 12 of us were dismissed to the jury room for our deliberation. And it was immediately clear once the door was closed that there were lots of opinions about what should be done about this man. Some were strongly in favor of a maximum sentence, others saw his guilt as a one-time crime that couldn't be duplicated, so he should be released with minimal sentence. And then there were a variety of other opinions between those two ideas.
 - ✓ The world likes to think there are lots of acceptable opinions about Christ; John says there are only two choices and there are unalterable consequences for both. There is no neutrality about Christ (Mt. 12:30).

- Belief: “God is TRUE”
 - ✓ There is *one who believes in the Son of God* (v. 10). That person has a continual (ongoing and growing) *belief* in Christ (not a “decision” that is quickly forgotten). This person exercises active, personal faith in Christ. He believes that what God has said about Christ is true.
 - ✓ The person who believes *has the testimony in himself* (v. 10). That is, the Spirit residing in the believer gives that believer affirmation of His salvation (**Rom. 8:16**; cf. vv. 12-18). That affirmation comes as he sees his life being conformed to Christ through cleansing from sin and through progressive sanctification. He enjoys the internal working of Christ in his life.
 - ✓ And the person who believes *has been given eternal life* by *God* (vv. 11, 12).
 - John is not merely taking about length of time, but he is talking about quality of life — it is something that is already possessed (*has been* given). There is a kind of living that is eternal and there is a kind of living that is deadly. The gospel is not just about forgiveness and escape from evil and sin. It is about life. How will you live? To have eternal life is to live in fellowship with Christ, united to Him (1:3-4).
 - John also says that this is a *gift from God*, emphasizing that it is something given by grace and not merited by favor (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 6:23).
 - And when John says this life is a *gift*, it also implies something else. My wife and children have started talking about and planning Christmas gifts already (Elizabeth said she’s already seen Christmas items in a store). They want to make sure they acquire just the right gifts. How much more can we expect from the infinitely loving and gracious Father who delights to give good things to His own? His best gift is an eternal kind of life now.
 - And that eternal *life is in His Son* (v. 11). The only way to acquire that life is through Jesus and the only way to enjoy that life is by enjoying Jesus. What do you think about when you think of Heaven? If you can conceive of any place where you can be happy and Christ is not there, then you have not believed the gospel, because the gospel is about getting us to God through Christ. The life comes by *His Son* and culminates *in His Son*.
- Rejection: “God is a LIAR”
 - ✓ If someone does not believe in Jesus, he is a rejecter of Jesus. He may say “I am moving toward Jesus” or “I don’t hate Jesus” or “I’m okay with Jesus” or “I’m not sure about Jesus, but it’s okay with me if you want Him.” But if he does not say “I love Jesus” and “I belong to Him through His substitutionary work on the cross,” then he has rejected Jesus and by not believing Jesus has *made God a liar*. He is saying God is a liar because God has offered a testimony of Jesus and he has *not believed the testimony God has given*. To reject the testimony is to assert that he is right and God is wrong.

- ✓ And there is only one possible outcome for that person. ***He does not have eternal life.***
 - He does not have the quality of eternal life now. And he (currently) has no hope of eternal life in the future (unless he repents).
 - In fact, John is emphatic about this — he does not say “he does not have eternal life,” but “he does not have *the life*.” The only kind of life worth having, he does not have. He does not possess that life, no matter how he protests and argues and asserts that he has life. To deny Christ is to be headed to destruction.
- This means as believers we have a really simple task: When we get into gospel discussions, it is very easy to become sidetracked by all kinds of issues: abortion, creation, homosexuality, epistemology (how do we know what we know?), the existence and proof of God, whether those who haven’t heard are damned, and the presence of evil in the world (“if God is good why is there evil?”). There is a place to answer those questions, but what is essential is the question about Christ — “do you believe that you are a sinner that is worthy of God’s judgment and are you willing to believe and follow Christ as the Savior and King?” There is no life without submitting to Christ. And there is only judgment by rejecting Him.
- If you have rejected Christ to this point, if Jesus is one of many choices to you, please understand that to not follow Him is to reject Him and to reject Him means you lose your life. Will you turn away from that rebellion and follow Him today? There is no life without Him and there is much life with Him.