

The Threefold Witness

1 John 5: 5-12.

G. Davison.

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These verses give us John's last reference to the Spirit in his epistle, and we see, above all else, that the Spirit of God is the living Witness in our souls of the divine things which have been engaging us as together.

Hence in verse 6, speaking of the Son of God in whom we have believed, he says "this is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." It might read "the Spirit is the truth," that is subjectively in the heart of believers, to maintain there livingly "the truth" that was manifested in the Son of God personally.

In the order given in verse 6, water, blood, Spirit, we see the way in which they are presented historically in John's gospel. We have the thought of "born of water" in John 3; living water "springing up into everlasting life" in John 4; and we read also "now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you," in John 15: 3. One great result of the coming of the Son of God into Manhood in this world, was to effect *moral cleansing* in men and women.

The water has come to light in relation to the Son of God, and we have been born of God and morally cleansed. In each one of us that work has begun and a foundation laid which gives us the power in our souls to take in this wonderful revelation of God that has come to us through His beloved Son. Apart from the effect of that water, not one of these divine things would ever have been understood by us. But the Son of God came in that way, "by water" in order to effect, first of all, moral cleansing in the souls of those who, hearing His word, would believe on Him as the fruit of being born of water and of the Spirit.

We then have the witness of the blood. In John 19, which is the only place where it is recorded, we read, "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water," verse 34. The water would have been valueless apart from the blood which has wrought redemption, and whereby God has been glorified and our sins been put away. As born of God we are cleansed from our sins in order that God might righteously and holily bring us into the wonderful blessing which He purposed, that is eternal life in His beloved Son. The operation of the water is seen in the word that came from His lips, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," John 15: 3, and secondly, the precious blood that He has shed is that which "cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John 1: 7.

Thirdly, as seen in verse 6 of our chapter, we read "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth." The Lord came in relation to these three great truths, moral cleansing; judicial cleansing or judicial expiation; and the gift of the Spirit of God, by whom these things are made good in our hearts. The water has dealt with our state; the blood has dealt with our guilt; and the Spirit of God, as a result of this two-fold work, dwells in the hearts of those who are morally and judicially cleansed, in order to bring them into the living enjoyment of the wonderful circle brought to light by the incoming of the Son of God into this world.

"The Spirit, and the water, and the blood." Historically in the gospel we have, first the water, then

the blood, and then the Lord breathing upon them and saying "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," John 20: 22. In John 20 it is not quite the thought of sealing, nor is it the bringing of the disciples into one body, but it is rather the impartation of eternal life by the quickening voice of the Son of God.

But when we consider the *enjoyment* of these things, the Spirit is put first. How are we to be kept in the continual consciousness of these things? How are we to know and enjoy them? I am sure it is only by the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts. He it is who brings us into the blessed knowledge of the effect of the water so that we may know that we are born of God. He it is who brings us into the wonderful liberty which has been made possible through that precious blood. We know our sins are forgiven, and hence the Holy Spirit brings to bear upon us the testimony of the other witnesses, each of which has a voice to our souls. The Spirit would remind us livingly of that moral cleansing; He would bring to bear upon us the power of judicial cleansing. Thus with the Spirit dwelling in our souls we know we are born of God; we know that our sins are forgiven, and "these three agree in one." What the Spirit is witnessing to, what the water is witnessing to, what the blood is witnessing to, is all with an objective in view.

In verse 9 we read, "If we receive the witness of men," that is the objective testimony that has reached us in the gospel, and we have believed it. We have received the witness of men in that we have believed the gospel. But we further read "The witness of God is greater." Do we not know this to be true experimentally? Of course we believe the Word of God, these divine communications which have been given to us, but is not the greatest matter of all the subjective working of the Spirit in our souls, by whom we are made to know these things in living power?

We have received the witness of men, we have received the gospel; but "the witness of God is greater." There is a living answer to these truths in our souls; we know they are ours; we know we have the power of them and the enjoyment of them too, because we know we are in fellowship with the Father, and in fellowship with the Son. This then is the objective in view, the point in relation to which they all agree, "he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record (the same word as witness) that God gave of His Son," verse 10. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life," verse 11. God has given to us eternal life; we are born of God, we have these new desires Godward, we know our sins are forgiven, and we know there is that in us which lives to God, *we have eternal life*.

This is the point where true believers agree, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son," verse 11.

We have remarked together that divine things are kept in their own sphere; God does not give us these things in a detached way. If we attempt to work them out in a detached way, we shall not know the blessed enjoyment of them. Where is this life? In John 5 there were those to whom the Lord said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye *think ye have* eternal life; and they are they which *testify of Me*. And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life," vv. 39-40. "This life is in His Son," and, "He that hath the Son hath life," verse 12. This living power is to keep us in the enjoyment of what we are in the Son, and we see in the wonderful testimony of these verses that we are made fit to be there through the water and the blood. The record has been given, the enjoyment of it is known as a living reality, we have eternal life, a life which is in the Son, so that we might move in communion with the Father, and in communion with the Son.

Do not let us be content to accept these things as mere terms; do not let us make them merely a matter of theology. This living divine Person, the Holy Spirit of God, is present to keep us in the power of them, and to cause us to intelligently respond to them, as we enjoy our portion in eternal life. The

Lord help us to know what it is to live there, and to live there continuously, as in communion with the Father and with the Son.