

How reliable is God's testimony?

1 John 5:6-12

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What do the following have in common? A narrator on an IMAX film; a physiotherapist; the writer of an article about the Olympics; a voice on the other end of a help line; and a mechanic at a garage. They are all people whose testimony or words I trusted this past week. We went to see the film Jerusalem in the IMAX at the Science Center. The narrator made several claims about the origin and naming of Jerusalem. I chose to believe most of his claims despite never having met the man. I'm getting physiotherapy for my back. The therapist gave me several instructions and exercises to do over the next few weeks. I barely know this therapist but I have chosen to trust their words and follow the instructions. I read an article about the Olympics. I chose to believe most of what the article said without checking too many sources. It sounded reasonable and possible. I've never met the author but I chose to trust their words. I was driving along Giroux Road when my car suddenly conked out. I was in the center lane of the road. So I pulled out my little AMA card. After a few minutes the voice on the other end of the line said "we will send a tow truck." I'd never talked to this person before. But I chose to trust them. Thankfully, I got my car going in a couple of minutes so I cancelled the tow truck. But I did call a mechanic at the garage. I know him a little. He gave me some advice about the car. I chose to trust his words.

Now my life was not at risk in these situations. If one of them shared unreliable information, it wouldn't have drastically affected me. With higher stakes, like a lot of money or a risk to our home or family or even life, I would put more effort into checking out the reliability of the people talking to us. But I simply wanted to illustrate that **we all depend on and accept the testimony of other people** in varying degrees every week.

So if we trust & believe what people say, **what do we think of God's testimony?** What do we think of God's Word and what God has proclaimed? Dismissing God and His Word as unreliable has become very fashionable today. It's becoming more and more common to relegate Christianity and the Bible to the category of fairy tales. People don't mind if you have a private religious belief. But don't bring Christianity or anything from the Bible into a serious discussion about the way the world works or how it was formed. Don't bring the Bible, God's Word, into any discussion about morality because it's outdated and unreliable.

This materialistic or naturalistic worldview is gaining more and more adherents. Basically it states that the only reality is what you can prove or duplicate in a lab. Or if science verifies something then it's real. But if you can't

scientifically prove something it's not true. I went on a skeptic's website this past week to examine some of these views. I think this one captures the current mood.

I am a materialist because there is no evidence of anything "non material" When and if there is, I will change my position. The same with evolution. The best current understanding of the genetic and fossil evidence is that evolution is a fact. When and if there is something against this, I will change my position. It doesn't matter how many people believe something, it is about the evidence.¹

Maybe you find you're agreeing with that view or at least wondering about it. If that describes you, then I'd encourage you to make some time available the night of April 6. We're going to be talking about the case for Jesus' resurrection followed by a question and answer time with some local Christian scholars. Or if you can't wait until April 6, please talk to Pastor Serge who loves to engage in respectful discussions about this. He continues to meet with the head of the Society of Edmonton Atheists to discuss this. So if you have questions about this, I'd invite you to consider those options.

But I invite all of us to consider our attitude towards God's testimony. We trust other people we haven't met or barely know with little things. People trust science and evidence and persuasive speakers. But do we trust God? Has God actually given us testimony about the way things are? How reliable is that testimony?

These questions come to us from 1st John near the end of this letter. Last time we were in it, we looked at indicators that pointed to a person born of God. These indicators were: A belief that Jesus is the Christ; a love for God; a love for God's people and a desire to obey God's commandments. Then John talked about how people born of God overcome the world by faith in Jesus, the Son of God. Now John continues with the only passage in the New Testament that specifically speaks of God's testimony this way. So I want you to see the testimony God provides and what results from accepting or rejecting this testimony. Then we will have opportunity to respond to God's testimony.

1 John 5:6-12 (ESV)

1 Jn 5:6 This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹ <http://sguforums.com/index.php?topic=48765.0> accessed Feb 18/

What testimony has God provided for us to consider? John lists **3 witnesses God provides concerning His Son**. The first two are found immediately in verse 6. “This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ: not by the water only but by the water and the blood.” So the first 2 witnesses are water and blood. Now what is John talking about here? How did Jesus come by water and by blood?

Some argued that water and blood refer to Jesus’ physical child birth because it involves water and blood. But equating water and blood with childbirth would be inconsistent for John. He commonly uses water and blood to refer to something very specific which we will see in a moment.

Others have argued that water and blood refer to the two sacraments or ordinances of the church – baptism (water) and communion (blood). But blood is not used as a symbol for the Lord’s Supper. It’s always bread and wine. And Jesus did not come through the Lord’s Supper.

Some also argued that water and blood refer to the moment that the spear entered Jesus’ side on the cross. At that moment, according to John 19:34-35, water and blood poured forth from Jesus’ body. But it’s not very clear how Jesus’ would come through the water and blood poured out at that moment.

The most likely and strongest interpretation of these witnesses in my view is that **water refers to Jesus’ baptism and blood refers to His sacrificial death on the cross**. Jesus’ baptism initiated his public ministry. . On the cross, His blood sacrifice paid for our sins. This was the culminating event of His ministry. If this is what John meant, then he’s pointing out that God gave us two events that can be located in history as witnesses to Jesus. He claims Jesus really was baptized in the Jordan. People saw and bore witness to it. Jesus really was crucified outside of Jerusalem. His blood flowed and people witnessed it and wrote about it and testify to it. Gospels testify – Jesus was baptized. We see his coming by blood especially testified to throughout the New Testament. We see the rest of the NT testify that Jesus came by blood. Acts 20:28 – Paul says to the Ephesian elders – “Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his blood.” Romans 5:9 – We have been justified by his blood. Ephesians 1:7 – In him we have redemption through his blood. Hebrews 9:12 – He entered the most high place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 13:12 – And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. So Jesus came by water – his baptism. He came by blood – His crucifixion.

Then John provides the third witness in the second half of verse 6. “And the Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. So the **Holy Spirit** is the 3rd witness. One of the Holy Spirit’s primary purposes is to bear witness to Jesus. To speak and remind us of Jesus’ words. To glorify Jesus. What did the Holy Spirit do during Jesus’ ministry? Well he showed up at Jesus’ baptism and descended on Jesus like a dove. He glorified Jesus at the transfiguration. The Holy Spirit works in hearts of believers to open their eyes to see the truth of who Christ is.

So John describes 3 witnesses that God provides concerning His Son. 2 are historical – Jesus’ baptism and Jesus crucifixion. One is spiritual and internal the Holy Spirit. John points out the 3 witnesses back in 1st John 5, verse 7 – For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. In the Jewish world, if you had 3 witnesses that testified to the same thing, you had a strong case. In fact, in the Old Testament law every charge had to be confirmed by 2 or 3 witnesses. John brings these three together and declares they all testify that Jesus is in fact, the Christ, the Son of God.

But this was not just John’s testimony. This was God’s idea. This was God’s testimony. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John makes this clear in verse 9. “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.” John argues from the lesser to the greater. We accept the testimony of humans. Why would we hesitate to accept the testimony from God himself? If human testimony is generally accepted, then God’s greater testimony is inescapable. Since God is infinitely superior to humans, his testimony should be regarded as infinitely weightier and tenaciously embraced. Robert Yarbrough writes “God’s testimony is permanent and final, not to be set aside or altered by neglect or human tampering. Another comments, ‘One time in the course of world history God appears as a witness, speaks clearly and gives proof. That took place at the sending of the Christ.’ So now we have God’s testimony – Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We have the 3 witnesses. He came through water – His baptism and blood – His crucifixion. The Holy Spirit continues to testify to this truth.

How might one respond to it? John goes on to describe the two possible ways you can respond to this testimony and the results of those response.

One way to respond is to **accept God’s testimony**. We consider the witnesses – Jesus’ baptism; the cross and the Holy Spirit. We accept that Jesus is who God said He is. If we accept this, we receive a couple of huge blessings. The first one is in verse 10. “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.” When we accept God’s

testimony, it somehow goes into us. We are given a **deeper assurance by the inward testimony** of the Holy Spirit that we were right to trust in Christ. It is true and He really was baptized and crucified despite what many people say.

And the second one is found in verses 11 and 12. “And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life.” So the second blessing John mentions is **eternal life**. What do you think of when you hear the phrase “eternal life?” Usually, we think of life for thousands of years after we die. That is certainly part of eternal life – a big part. But what does John say about eternal life? When do we get it?

Verse 11 again – and this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life.” Not “God is going to give us eternal life.” God gave us eternal life. So we have eternal life now. But how can that be when we think of the thousands of blessed years in heaven. We’re certainly not in heaven now. Might our understanding of eternal life need to broaden?

Well we might have to revamp our view of eternal life if we think it’s basically going on a cruise ship for 10000 years. There are blessings of eternal life but they are not primarily focused on what we will enjoy but who we will be with. Jesus defines eternal life for us in John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life means to know God and Jesus intimately. Eternal life involves the discovery that our greatest satisfaction is found in knowing Christ. John equates eternal life with knowing Jesus in 1st John 5:11 – God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son.” Then he hammers home the point – Whoever has the Son has life.” If you accept God’s testimony about His Son and put your trust in Christ, you receive eternal life from God. One commentator writes “Eternal life is qualitative not primarily quantitative. It’s not about number of years but who we know and the quality of life we enjoy. It is the highest kind of spiritual and moral life, which God enables the believer to share in relationship with Jesus. We can taste and experience eternal life today by going deeper with Jesus.

But some of us are so deep into the world that we think life apart from Jesus is the ultimate life. Jesus is a compartment of our lives we make time for once a week. Real life is what you find in the world. These conclusions reflect the other possible response to God’s testimony. We can **reject God’s testimony**. We can look at His witnesses and conclude we don’t believe them. They’re not trustworthy. We’re going a different way. John describes the results of such a choice. Second half of verse 10 – “Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son.” So a person who rejects God’s testimony **calls God a**

liar. I wonder how many people who have rejected God's testimony recognize this. They're accusing the holy God of lying. They do not trust God and His Word.

If you had a solid testimony about something that happened in your life, how would you like it if someone rejected what you knew to be true? How would like it if they just didn't believe you? Your sense of justice would be offended. It would provoke you. So think about what calling the Holy God a liar might do?

John unmasks the myth that unbelief in God is some sad misfortune. "Oh that person didn't really mean to reject God. They just didn't have enough evidence. Or they missed it. Or they're life circumstances prevented them from knowing the true God." John leaves no room for this. Unbelief is sin. It rejects God's testimony. There are many examples from Scripture of why people don't accept God's testimony.

Some are willfully ignorant (John 4:22). They choose not to know or to turn away from the news. Some are apathetic. They just don't care. But they cannot ignore the God of the universe. Some withdraw out of cowardice or disenchantment. This Christianity thing didn't work out like I thought it would. So I quit just like a bunch of so called disciples did to Jesus in John 6:66. Some pay hypocritical lip service to God pretending to believe when all the time they don't. Some hold secret contempt for Jesus. Some are openly hostile. Some practice misplaced skepticism like Thomas who would not believe unless he saw and touched the risen Christ. God showed mercy to Him in Jesus' appearing. But many follow in Thomas' initial path refusing to believe unless they are given material evidence.

Humans who reject God's testimony about His Son are lost. They are untouched by the saving work of Christ and headed for destruction. They need not do anything extra to draw divine displeasure; they attract and deserve it by nature as well as deed. John makes this lostness clear at the end of verse 12. Whoever does not have the Son does not have life. Yarbrough writes *John's grim assessment of the human condition with respect to Christ may raise eyebrows in Western cultures that have constructed a god figure toward whom all religions allegedly strive towards – and who regard all religious beliefs as equally valid. This outlook is reflected in a Chicago area newspaper – May 1, 2003 – Lake County United committed to common good – "Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Hindus who worship the one God work together to help build the kingdom." But this is ignorant of religion. The Koran deplores the Christian doctrine of God; Hindus do not believe in one god but in many. Jews are unlikely to exalt the kingdom of Christ whom they deny ever came.* All religions do not lead to God. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son does not

have life. I do not share this out of arrogance or to win an argument. I share it out of deep concern that some of you might be sitting there complacently thinking I'm okay because I've got some belief in some vague God figure of my own comfort. You might be lost and accusing God of lying and without eternal life. I don't want that for you. God certainly doesn't want that for you.

He provided 3 witnesses so you might know him. He has given you His testimony. **How will you respond?**

If you have accepted God's testimony about His Son, you have the Spirit in you and enjoy eternal life. You have responded to the entire aim of John's letter – that you might believe in the Son and live life with Him. You have placed your faith in the most trustworthy person in the universe. He will continue to give grace and strengthen you. He is faithful to you.

Some are **Non-believers - will you accept the Son for the very first time?** If you have rejected God's testimony – is that really what you mean to do? Do you want to continue calling God a liar? Will you reconsider the testimony of God?

Some are **Believers - will you enjoy the eternal life you have now.** You do that by knowing God and His Son – and going deeper and deeper with them.

Some are **Doubting believers will you pray for strengthening of your faith.** When I doubt that God is for me, I have to go back to His testimony. This past week I read Lamentations 3:21-24. It was written by Jeremiah who experienced the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He saw the city fall and burn. And he suffered intensely during the siege because the officials rejected his testimony from God and did not want to hear it. He suffered with the great catastrophe of seeing the capital destroyed; the temple burned; the walls pulled down; the leadership slaughtered; thousands taken into captivity. Yet he is able to write "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness!" He looked to the Lord and His strength to keep going.

We need to ask the Lord to strengthen our faith and help us. Keeping the faith and living by faith is not easy. Jesus constantly remarked about the lack of faith in God. Matt. 6:30 – But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, "O you of little faith." Matt. 8:26 – "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" When we realize we have little faith, we need to ask for more. Mark 9

– Jesus heals a boy with an unclean spirit and the Father asks - “But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said “I believe; ‘help my unbelief!’” Luke 17:5 – The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Jesus said “Strive to enter by the narrow door.” Agonizomai – Luke 13:24 – strive like an athlete. We need help to keep the faith. It is hard.

Yet it is also easy – Matt. 11:28-30 – “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.” It is easy if we are willing to renounce self-reliance, self-direction and self-exaltation). Our assurance to keep going in the faith does not solely depend on looking back to the momentary decision we made for Christ. We must look forward to the certainty of God’s preserving grace based on the all-sufficient atonement of his Son’s death. And Jesus’ ongoing work of prayer for us today – Romans 8:34 – the way he prayed for Peter – “Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22: 31-32). He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6) It is God who works in you to will and to work for His pleasure. (Phil. 2:13) So maybe you have accepted God’s testimony about His Son but your faith is weak today. Will you come before Jesus now and cry out – Lord increase my faith! Then walk in the eternal life you have now.