

Module 20: 1 John 5:6-9

Group Exercise 1

What title do you suggest for the paragraph in 1 John 5:6-9? (Please disregard the following in verse 7 (KJV), “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one,” as it is not in the early manuscripts. Likewise disregard “in earth” in verse 8.) What words do you see as important in this paragraph?

Group Exercise 2

What is the main point of this paragraph (5:6-9)? Why do you think John included this paragraph as part of his letter? Do you think John could make his point without including this paragraph?

Group Exercise 3

What are “water and blood” in this paragraph? Are they

- The sacraments of baptism and communion?
- Fluids that came from Jesus’ side when He was pierced?
- The beginning and ending of Christ’s ministry on earth?

Group Exercise 4

Verse 7 and 8 (NAS) says there are “three that testify”. Verse 9 says that God testified. So, is it *three* or *four* or *one* that testifies? Use 1 John 4:2, Mark 1:9-11, and John 12:27-29 to help you unravel this.

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) In the KJV, verse 7 and the words “in earth” in verse 8 are not in any Greek manuscripts, version, or quotation before the 15th century.
 - i) Commonly known as the Johannine Comma.
 - ii) This is considered a scribal gloss. A gloss (from Koine Greek *glossa*, meaning ‘tongue’ (the organ) as well as ‘language’) is a note made in the margins or between lines of text.
 - iii) These words first appear in a fourth century Latin manuscript.
 - iv) Also found in the third edition of Erasmus’ text, which led to its inclusion in the KJV.
 - v) Due to this, **verses 6-8 may vary significantly amongst the translations.**
- b) Read 1 John 5:1-12 for context.
- c) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 5:6-9?
- d) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 5:6?
- e) Transition – links to previous verses
 - i) Immediate context: “This is the One . . . Jesus Christ” (6)
 - (1) A further explanation of “Jesus” (5)
 - (2) “Jesus” is also referred to earlier in the previous paragraph (1)

- ii) Book context: Jesus is “the Christ come in the flesh”. (4:2)
- iii) How can we come to faith in the divine-human Person of Jesus? This is answered in the next three paragraphs. (Stott)
 - (1) Faith depends on testimony
 - (2) Reasonableness of belief is based on the validity of the testimony
- f) “This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ;” (6a)
 - i) Plummer calls verse 6 the “most perplexing” phrases in the Epistle.
 - (1) John was using an expression which was already familiar to his readers.
 - (a) Perhaps through John’s own teaching.
 - (b) Perhaps through the teaching of the false teachers.
 - (2) It is not so readily understood by us.
 - ii) Interpretation #1: The two sacraments of baptism and communion
 - (1) Held by reformers including Luther and Calvin.
 - (2) If “water” stands for baptism, “blood” is an awkward symbol for the Lord’s Supper.
 - (a) Unnatural symbol, because blood is one of the elements signified (body and blood). So why is blood a symbol of blood?
 - (b) Incomplete symbol, because blood as a symbol does not account for the element of the body of Christ.
 - (3) Jesus “came” through water and blood. This refers to His past historical coming. The sacraments are an ongoing symbol; Jesus did not come in the past through the sacraments.
 - iii) Interpretation #2: Christ’s wounding while on the cross
 - (1) Held by Augustine and others.
 - (2) John 19:34-35 says “blood and water” came out of Jesus’ pierced side.
 - (3) Jesus did not come “through” water and blood when those fluids came out of Him.
 - (4) In the Gospel, John is witness to these fluids. In the Epistle, these symbols are witness to Jesus. These passages are not parallel.
 - (5) The order is reversed. Water, then blood, versus blood, then water.
 - iv) Interpretation #3: The beginning and ending of Christ’s ministry on earth
 - (1) First held by Tertullian, this is the best interpretation.
 - (2) “Water” refers to the baptism of Jesus. It was then He was declared the Son of God and commissioned and empowered for His work. “Blood” refers to His death, in which His work was finished.
 - (3) Meets the requirement of a historical experience “through” which He passed.
 - (4) The coming referred to is not His birth in Bethlehem, but rather His public appearing as the promised Messiah. (Hiebert)
 - (5) His baptism and death both testify to His divine-human Person.
- g) “not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.” (6b)
 - i) “not with water only”
 - (1) The Docetic Gnostics denied that Jesus Christ had a human body, teaching that He only appeared to be human.
 - (2) The Cerinthian Gnostics believed that Jesus was the Christ at His baptism, but not at His crucifixion. They falsely taught that Jesus was a mere man

upon whom Christ descended at the baptism and from whom the Christ departed before the cross.

- (3) Emphasizing that Jesus also came through the “blood”, rejecting all attempts to sever the divine from the human, seems directly to be aimed at both of these Gnostic teachings.
 - ii) “the water” and “the blood” – definite article point back to specific historical events.
 - iii) “with” (6b) versus “by” (6a)
 - (1) Majority of scholars see no significant difference in this variation.
 - (2) Lenski see “means” (by) and “in connection with” (with).
 - iv) These constitute external testimony.
- h) “It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth” (6c)
 - i) This refers to the Holy Spirit.
 - ii) Greek construction indicates that it is characteristic of the Spirit that He “testifies” as it is of Christ that He “came”.
 - iii) “Without His testimony the true significance of the “water and blood” remains unintelligible to the natural human heart.” (Hiebert)
 - iv) In 6a the aorist tense is used to emphasize the actual coming of Jesus; in 6c present tense is used to stress the continuing activity of the Spirit in interpreting and applying the true significance of Christ’s mission to human hearts. (Hiebert)
 - v) “the Spirit is the truth” stresses the total reliability of this testimony, grounded in the very nature of the Spirit. (Hiebert)
 - vi) This constitutes internal testimony.
- i) “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.” (7, 8)
 - i) “For” – Loose usage, can be rendered “indeed”.
 - ii) Previously, only the Spirit was said to “testify”.
 - iii) Now John says that the water and the blood also “testify”.
 - iv) Not only do they all testify, but moreover, they all three agree.
 - (1) The false witnesses at the trial of Jesus did not agree (Mark 14:56, 59).
 - (2) According to the law, no charge could be accepted against someone in court unless it was confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15; cf. John 8:17, 18).
 - v) “In contrast to verse 6, the Spirit is here placed as the first witness, partly because ‘the Spirit is, of the three, the only living and active witness’, and partly because ‘the water and the blood are no witnesses without Him; whereas He is independent of them, testifying both in them and out of them’” (Stott quoting Alford)
 - vi) Inanimate objects can give testimony
 - (1) Jesus’ works bear witness (John 5:36)
 - (2) Faith-prompted sacrifice of Abel still speaks (Hebrews 11:4)
 - (3) Heap of stones is a witness (Genesis 31:48)
- j) “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.”

- i) The reason the Spirit, the water, and the blood all agree is because God Himself is behind them.
 - (1) “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (4:2)
 - (2) At Christ’s baptism God declares his approval of His Son. (Mark 1:9-11)
 - (3) Just before Christ’s crucifixion during Passion Week, God declares His glory as Christ states that His purpose for coming was to die. (John 12:27-29).
- ii) We accept human testimony. How much more reliable is divine testimony.
- iii) “In neglecting or rejecting this testimony, the unbeliever is less reasonable with God than he is with fellow human beings.” (Hiebert)
- iv) God, the Father, has testified (perfect tense). “God has placed Himself permanently on record as bearing witness to His Son. This fact is a settled reality.” (Hiebert)
- k) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

This one is He who did come by means of water and blood. He is Jesus Christ. He came not with the water only, but in connection with the water and in connection with the blood. “Water” refers to the beginning of His earthly ministry at His baptism. “Blood” refers to the ending of His earthly ministry at His crucifixion. And it is the Spirit that continually interprets and applies the true significance of Christ’s mission to human hearts, because the Spirit is totally reliable by His very nature.

Indeed there are three that are testifying:

the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

If we accept and believe the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater and far more reliable to be believed; for the testimony of God is this, that He has put Himself on record as declaring the reality of His Son.

3) Applications

- a) What in this world is reliable? Does the triple testimony of the Spirit, water, and blood stand in contrast to the declarations of this world? What is your response to that?
- b) What are other dependable truths about God and His Word that make a difference in your daily life?
- c) What other application do you have?