

Born of God¹

1 John 5:1-12

June 3, 2018

Read 1 John 5:1-12. Our Scripture reading this morning ended with 1 John 5:11-12, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” So, according to verse 12, each one of us is in 1 of 2 situations: either we have the Son and we have life or we do not have the Son and we do not have life. Reading this in context with verse 11, we can see that this life we are talking about is eternal life. Eternal life should not be understood as something way off in the future, that we receive when we die. This verb here, “has”² is in the present tense. Therefore, eternal life begins immediately; as soon as someone has the Son they have life.³ Christ-followers are given eternal life “as a present possession.”⁴ By “eternal life,” we don’t mean our physical life. What we are referring to here is spiritual life. This is a big deal. It begs our opening questions: Do YOU personally have the Son? Do YOU personally have spiritual life?

The first thing that we should note about spiritual life is where it is found.

1) Spiritual life is found in a Person. Far too many people try to find spiritual life in following a certain religion, or in obeying a certain set of moral rules, or in just trying really hard to be a better person. Spiritual life is not something we can drum up on our own. This text makes it clear that life isn’t found in religion or rules or trying really hard. Life is found in God’s Son, in Jesus.⁵ 1 John 5:11 says, “...God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” The ultimate object of faith...is a Person. That Person is Jesus Christ.”⁶ Pastor Dave Johnson, from church of the Open Door, says, “eternal life is a “who” not a commodity.” John began his letter, talking about Jesus as “The life” in 1 John 1:2, “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

If you’ve been frustrated in your search for spiritual life perhaps that’s because you’ve been looking in the wrong places or looking to the wrong things to bring you life. Jesus is the life we are looking for. The letter of 1 John talks about life quite a bit actually. In fact, the word “life” is scattered 15 times throughout this letter. The letter begins in 1 John 1:1 by calling Jesus the “Word of life.” Spiritual life is found in a Person; His name is Jesus Christ.

2) Those who’ve found Jesus believe God’s testimony. Verse 9 introduces an interesting phrase, “God’s testimony.” I don’t know that I’ve ever seen that anywhere else in the Bible. Usually when we talk about someone’s testimony it’s our testimony about God or about Jesus. But here we find God’s testimony about Jesus. God’s testimony about Jesus is summarized in verses 11-12, but it is laid out in greater detail in the preceding context. 1 John 5:6-8 tells us, “This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”

Let’s take a closer look at these three who testify:

1) The blood testifies to Jesus’ death on the cross. God’s testimony is that we can have life in His Son. In order for us to have this life, Jesus had to die in our place and provide us with a way back to

¹ “Born of God” (γεννάω) is used 8 times in 1 John: 2:29; 3:9 twice; 4:7; 5:1 three times, and 5:4.

² (ἔχει)

³ **A Note on Eternal Life:** The First Letter of John begins and ends on the note of eternal life (1:1–2; 5:20), and the theme of eternal life pervades throughout. At one point the author describes the purpose of his letter to be that his readers might know that they have eternal life (5:13). **The expressions ‘life’ and ‘eternal life’ are used interchangeably.** In 1 John eternal life almost always refers to a present experience as far as believers are concerned. (Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 184). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.)

⁴ See the *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, note on p. 2131.

⁵ It is summarized this way in John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”

⁶ Glenn W. Barker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 12*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 352. Also consider John 14:6 where Jesus said “I am...the life.”

God. God's testimony was in first sending Jesus to the cross, then in raising Him from the dead on the 3rd day. This confirmed that He accepted the payment as paid in full.

2) The water testifies to Jesus' baptism. God's testimony was clearly shown here in His affirmation of Jesus' identity. God testified from heaven on the day of Jesus' public baptism in Mt. 3:17. The Heavenly Father's voice came from heaven and said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." In other words, "this is the Messiah you've been waiting for; pay attention to Him."⁷

3) The Spirit testifies agreement in various ways. He descended in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism.⁸ He convicts sinners of their need for Jesus' sacrificial death. In fact, the Spirit is the One who brings sinners into union with Christ.⁹ Also, He testifies by His indwelling and empowering presence in believers' lives.¹⁰

God testifies through all three of these: the blood/the water/the Spirit. They are all in agreement about who Jesus is and what He did. This is God's testimony about His Son, our Messiah. 1 John 5:9 says, "We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son." "John's point is that we should accept God's testimony precisely because it is God's testimony about his Son."¹¹

The reason John is summarizing all of this at the end of his letter is that he has been building this case throughout his letter. There were people who were actively rejecting God's testimony. In fact, they were teaching others to do the same. We learned about them previously. These people used to be part of the church but now they were promoting false teachings. The group was known as the Cerinthians. And John is not very fond of them. In fact, he calls them outright liars. This is who he is referring to in 1 John 5:10, "Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son."

The Cerinthians were calling God a liar by rejecting His testimony about His own Son. You see, the Cerinthians taught that Jesus was just an average guy up until the Messiah came into Him at His baptism. Then, according to them, the Messiah left Jesus before He died on the cross. Because of their early gnostic understandings of the world, they believed that all flesh, anything which is matter, was evil. They were quite comfortable with the idea of God as Spirit, but they rejected the biblical, apostolic witness that Messiah came in the flesh and died in the flesh.¹² This is why 1 John 5:6 articulates the argument, "This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood..." Apparently, these Cerinthians were willing to agree that Jesus Christ came "by water," (that the Messiah came upon Him at His point of baptism) but they denied that he came by blood (that Messiah's physical body died on the cross).¹³

This is also why 1 John 5:1 states, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..." John is clarifying that anyone who is truly born of God will believe that Jesus is the Christ. By Christ he means the Messiah. But, the Bible teaches us that Jesus has always been the Christ, including His entire time on earth. When He was born a baby in Bethlehem and right on through His suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. If Jesus only died as an average human, then his payment on the cross would not be sufficient to pay the punishment for our sin. To meet God's just demand, the sacrifice had to be a perfect, spotless lamb. Back in 1 John 2:1-2 we learned that, "...we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

In Jewish culture, important decisions were based on the testimony of at least 2-3 witnesses. For example, Deuteronomy 19:15 taught Old Testament Israel, "One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. **A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.**" And, some 1,400 years later, the Apostle Paul refers to this principle again in 2 Corinthians 13:1, "**Every matter must be established by the testimony**

⁷ See the *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, text note on Matthew 3:17 on p. 1595.

⁸ See John 1:32-34.

⁹ See John 15:26 and 1 John 2:24-27.

¹⁰ Consider also Romans 8:16.

¹¹ Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 200). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹² See John 1:14 and 1 John 1:1-4.

¹³ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2569.

of two or three witnesses.” This is why John wrote in 1 John 5:7-8, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and **the three are in agreement.**”¹⁴

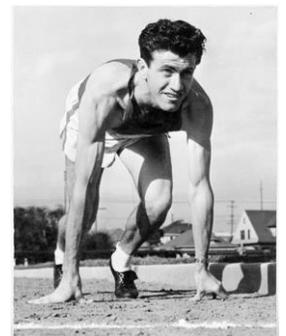
Therefore, John is showing that there is more than adequate evidence for why his readers should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John began building his case with a strong statement at the beginning of his letter, as an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Christ. He’s now approaching the end of his letter. It’s almost as if he’s making his closing argument here: “If you can’t accept my human testimony, you should at least accept God’s testimony.” John has been appealing to his readers throughout: someone is telling the truth here and someone is lying.¹⁵ So, how about you? **Do you believe God’s testimony about Jesus?** We began with 1 John 5:11-12, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” You either do or you don’t. There is no middle ground. There comes a time in each of our lives when we need to stop vacillating and equivocating and we need to cross the line of faith. Accepting God’s testimony is the key to having the Son and having life.

The title of my message today is “Born of God.” I chose that title because John uses that phrase twice in our passage this morning; once in verse 1 and once in verse 4. Being “Born of God” is the same as being “born again” which is a phrase that has gained some negative baggage in the last few decades. However, it’s a very good phrase. Being “born again” or “born of God” is a birth that God initiates through his Spirit, and it takes place in conjunction with faith in Christ.” In his Gospel, John explains it this way in John 1:12-13, “Yet to all who did receive him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”¹⁶

A few years ago, I read a book entitled, “Born Again.”¹⁷ It’s a fascinating read. It’s the history of Chuck Colson’s life, serving in the Nixon administration and going through the Watergate Scandal, which ends up landing Colson in an Alabama prison. More importantly though, it shares the personal testimony of Mr. Colson. He details how his own pride and ego led him to amazing heights of position and power in the White House. He was known as Nixon’s “hatchet man,” who handled all his dirty work. The book also details how lonely and empty Colson felt, even during some of the greatest moments in his career. An awareness of his need for God began to creep into the distant recesses of his mind.

There is an interesting turn in Chuck Colson’s life when he talks with a man named, Tom Phillips. Chuck had noticed a radical change in Tom and he wanted to know more about it. Tom then proceeds to tell Chuck the testimony of how his own rise to power and wealth had left him with a feeling of terrible emptiness. Tom began to read the Bible and realized that he needed a personal relationship with God. All this gave Chuck Colson a prickly feeling that ran down his spine.¹⁸ Well, here’s a spoiler alert, Tom’s testimony along with a few other things were instrumental in leading Chuck Colson to give his life to Christ. Chuck Colson was born again. He found spiritual life in the Person of Jesus Christ. And, from that point on, everything changed. You should read the book or listen to it on audio.

There are numerous other testimonies like this that you can read. Louis Zamperini is another fascinating story of God’s love and grace in action. It illustrates



¹⁴ John seems to be saying, “... that alongside the Spirit’s witness concerning Jesus there stands the silent witness of Jesus’ baptism (“the water”) and his atoning sacrifice (“the blood”).” (*NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2015, p. 2569.)

¹⁵ John has been making a case against these liars all throughout his letter. He begins in 1 John 1:10, “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.” In 1 John 2:4 he says, “Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.” Then, in 1 John 2:22 he asks, “Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son.” 1 John 4:20 says, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar...” And now, near the end of his letter, the Apostle John clarifies the bottom line in 1 John 5:10, “Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.”

¹⁶ Read John 3:1-15 and the story of the Pharisee Nicodemus when Jesus explains to him that “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” In fact, this entire passage has several direct parallels to 1 John 5:1-12.

¹⁷ Charles W. Colson, *Born Again*, Chosen Books, Inc., Old Tappan, NJ, 1976.

¹⁸ Colson, pp. 108-109 in particular.

God's forgiveness in a powerful way and how He teaches us to forgive others. I share these because we all need to remember that our testimony matters. You never know who God might use. He could use your testimony in a significant way to lead someone else to Christ.

3) Anyone born of God should share their testimony. Share it with someone at lunch today, even if they are a fellow believer. What an encouragement it can be to hear each other's stories of faith. Wouldn't it be fascinating to know the testimony of everyone who sits in your section on Sunday morning? Share it with someone at work or school this week. Ok, I'm just kidding about school – school is out for summer! But as you are hanging out with friends or neighbors, **take the initiative to tell your story of how you met God.** You are the only one who can tell that story with genuine sincerity because you are the one who has lived it. As an ambassador of Christ, why not write down your testimony and send it out to a few relatives or friends? Be a witness to God's love and power. I'm not saying that you need to preach at anyone. Just find a way to appropriately share how you found spiritual life in Jesus. Explain why you believe that God's testimony about Jesus is true.

By the way, if you are not yet a believer in Christ, let me offer you this suggestion. Find someone you know who is following Jesus and ask them to tell you their story over a cup of coffee or some ice cream. Why not hear them out and see what they have to say?

Spiritual life is found in a person and His name is Jesus Christ.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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