

1 John 5:6-8

1Jn 5:6 This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

As we begin [1 John 5:6-8](#) it is critical to address what has always been a difficult issue – what could simply be called a very poor and inaccurate translation. If we understand what actually occurred, it should not be difficult to appreciate the dilemma that a bad translation has caused. I want to take the time to do this for two simple reasons. The first is that I want to be sure that we are handling the Word of God correctly and rightly dividing the Scriptures. Nothing is more important to the life of God's church than how His Word is handled. Every message must be accurate. The second reason is that I want you to be knowledgeable of various issues that often occur in the translation process, and this is one of those passages that has had a translation issue associated with it. This passage has historically been considered one of the most difficult passages in all of Scripture to properly interpret and certainly the most difficult passage in [1 John](#). In order to handle this properly, it will take two distinct studies.

The study today will be foundational, and then next week we will provide the additional clarity that is needed to come to the proper interpretation of these verses. Today's message is preparatory, preliminary, and foundational for next week's message, so I hope that you do not become bored with just basic information. I will not be able to complete today's message, so I will simply have to begin next week where I leave off today. Based on where I stop today, I may just leave you hanging. I struggled about even approaching the passage this way, but I believe it will ultimately be more helpful to how we come to our interpretation and understanding of the passage, so just bear with me.

Before addressing the actual issue of this passage, I want to give a kind of preliminary overview of [1 John 5:6-12](#). All seven verses are concerned with the person of Christ. Everything in the Christian life is dependent on the doctrine of Christ – His person, His incarnation, His life, His atoning death, His resurrection, His high priestly ministry for believers, His Second Coming and millennial reign, and His reign in the eternal state. Apart from Christ there is no Christianity. Anyone can believe that there is a God, but that does not constitute biblical salvation in any sense of the New Testament definition of salvation. For instance, the orthodox Jews believe in God, but they do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. What makes someone a Christian is that they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and entrust their life to Him.¹ Everything that they believe about their sins being forgiven, about how they live their life, and about their eternal security is all built on the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for their sins. If someone is going to base their entire life on something, then they need to be absolutely certain that what they are basing their life on is in reality actually true. It does no one any good to believe something that is not actually true. From a biblical perspective, the Bible has absolutely nothing to offer someone apart from the person of Christ. Christ is not a kind of proposition or proposal that the Scriptures are offering to people to consider. He is not merely some kind of recommendation or suggestion that the Scriptures are providing to people. What the Bible is clearly

declaring is that apart from Christ that men will die in their sins and be eternally separated from God with no recourse to resolve their unbelief after they die.

Now, [1 John 5:6-12](#) has a clear and distinct message. Two of the key terms to understand this passage is the Greek word for “**bear witness**” and the word “**testimony**”. Both of those words come from the same Greek word “*martyria*” from where the English word “martyr” is derived, but they are translated differently in some of the other translations. The NIV, ESV, and NASB actually use the word “**testify**” for the verb “**bear witness**”. The noun and verb form of the word are used nine different times in these seven verses. Our hermeneutical principle is that when the author consistently repeats something in a passage that is what they are emphasizing. So, these verses are repeatedly testifying and giving testimony to something. If you saw an accident or a crime, you may be called on to testify and give witness to what you had seen. Well, that is exactly what John is doing here.

- (1) In v6-8 John is delineating and testifying concerning the person of Jesus Christ. If in fact Christ is the “**Son of God**” (which He certainly is), then everything in life and eternity hinges on what someone does with Him.
- (2) In v9-10, John wants his readers to understand the reasons why they should believe the testimonies that he has provided. Any valid testimony has to ensure that the one testifying is credible and trustworthy in what they are testifying.
- (3) In v11-12 John provides the significances of actually believing the valid testimonies.² I.e., what actually happens to someone and what is the benefit that is accrued to them if they actually believe the testimonies concerning Christ?

So, those are the three main issues that John is going to address, and they all revolve around the person of Christ. Everyone’s eternal destiny depends on whether or not they truly believe that Jesus Christ is the “**Son of God**”. If they do, then v11-12 declare the results of that sincere belief. The individual is given “**eternal life**”. [1 John 5:11](#) says,

¹Jn 5:11 **And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
¹²**He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.****

This eternal life is found exclusively in the “**Son of God**” and nowhere else. [Acts 4:12](#) says it this way,

^{Ac 4:12} **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

Now, the translation issue that must be addressed occurs in v7 and the first part of v8. In the KJV and the NKJV, the verses read as follows:

¹Jn 5:7 **For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.**

Compare that to how these same verses are translated in the NIV, NASB, ESV, and most of the other good translations:

¹Jn 5:7 **For there are three that testify: ⁸the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement.** (NIV, NASB, ESV)

In the later translations there is nothing about the three that “**bear witness in heaven**” or the three that “**bear witness on earth**”. So, the issue is why the major difference between the KJV and NKJV and the other translations? We will clarify these issues next week, so just bear with me for the remainder of this message.

What I am going to do is to take some time to discuss how we got the Bible and how it specifically impacts this passage of Scripture. The actual reason will be provided in the next study, but we must provide some foundational information first. It is basically a question of what is called “textual criticism”. “Textual Criticism” is a very, very important area of study where biblical scholars endeavor to determine as far as is possible the actual text that approximates most closely to the original document that the author wrote.³ The differences found in textual analysis are so minor that they have absolutely no bearing on the meaning of a passage or a doctrine in a passage, and we will discuss that later when we identify why the KJV and NKJV added words that are not in the later translations. The “textual critic” approaches the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. They accept its truth and are simply trying to ensure that the original texts from which a Bible is translated is the most accurate manuscript possible to the original documents.

“Higher Criticism” approaches the Bible like it is any other book. Their goal is to criticize it as much as is possible, to dissect it, to try and find errors and discrepancies in it, and then to impose their own ideas on the Bible. Their actual goal is to undermine the Scriptures, not validate them. They start with certain pre-supposed objectives, ideas, and personal propensities and inclinations that distort the very purpose for which they are doing their research. For instance, they would never accept that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. That is actually what they are trying to disprove. They would not begin with the idea that the Word of God is divinely inspired. They would simply say that the Bible was merely written by men and their criticism would center on disputing the Bible, not enhancing its claims. They would say that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible. They do not believe in the miracles. They dismiss the historical claims of the Bible. They believe in evolution and discredit creation and [Genesis 1](#). They place science as a major proponent and factor for discrediting the Bible.

So, here is the difference between textual criticism and higher criticism. Textual criticism never tries to change the truth and the great doctrines of Scripture, but rather to elevate and enhance them. However, higher criticism is actually attacking the truth and the veracity of Scripture. They are not only attacking the divine inspiration of Scripture, but also the great doctrines of Scripture like the Incarnation or the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They believe that their ideas are more accurate than divine revelation.

Now, at this point I want to make some simple distinctions between several terms - **revelation**, **inspiration**, and **inerrancy**. They are different terms that are very similar to one another, and they are very connected to one another, but they remain distinctly different.

Revelation is the act by which God gave men knowledge about Himself and His creation, which man could not otherwise have known. Revelation deals with the simple communication of truth from God to people. We do not always know exactly how God revealed things to people. We know, for instance, that He gave Daniel some dreams, He gave John some visions, He placed some of His information on tablets of stone, and to others He actually spoke to them. For us, the actual “how” is not

critical. It is the “what” God revealed that is important. Revelation is God’s communicating to some specific individual in the past the truths that we need to know in order to be rightly related to Him. Obviously the truth revealed in Scripture is not exhaustive, but it is all that God has given to us.

Inspiration deals with “how” God’s revelation is transferred to other people. It involves the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers, and it is this influence that renders what they wrote to actually be the Word of God. I.e., God revealed something to them, and then they made God’s truth available to others. Inspiration refers to the supernatural guidance of the writers of Scripture by the Spirit of God, so that what they wrote was the divine Word of God, transcribed **accurately, reliably,** and **without error** in the original manuscripts known as **autographs**.

Inerrancy means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not assert or state anything that is contrary to fact or not true. The term inerrancy means that what God revealed and inspired is accurate, reliable, authoritative, and without error. Inerrancy can be defined as truthfulness. It means that **the Bible always tells the truth and that it always tells the truth concerning everything that it talks about.** Obviously, this does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but what it does tell us about any subject is true. It does not mean that Scripture is exact in every piece of information that it gives us. In many cases, the intent of the information is to simply give us a general understanding of the information. The degree of precision and accuracy is completely dependent on what the writer is intending to convey to his readers. All of us talk with a fickle degree of precision – sometimes more, sometimes less. It may be the population of where we live, or the size of a crowd, or mileage. It is only approximate and it is normal.

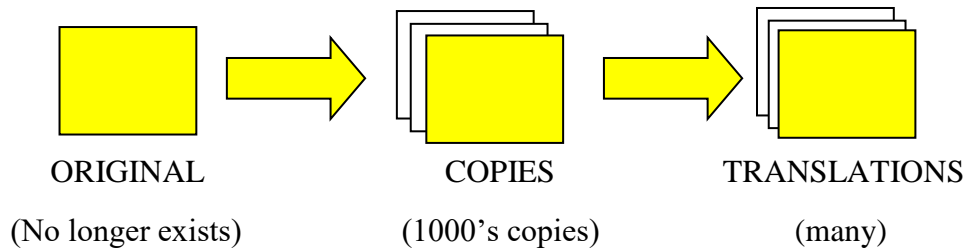
These are really fundamental issues to our faith. If one part of Scripture cannot be trusted, then that raises the question as to what other parts can be trusted, or can any of it be trusted. That is the real issue here. There are certain historical and scientific matters that for the most part we can verify. But there are other matters, mostly doctrinal – for instance, statements about the nature of God or the atonement – that cannot be verified in a test tube or by history. They are truths that completely transcend our senses. So, if the Bible would be found to be false in the other areas, then obviously these transcendent truths could not be trusted either. The implications are enormous. The point is sometimes regarded as a domino effect – false in one, false in all. But the more logical argument would be – false in one, uncertain in all. Once again, the implications are enormous. If we start accepting errors in the Bible, it immediately raises the question of who decides what is right or wrong, who decides what is true or false. The critic, then, ultimately places himself as an authority over the Scriptures, and ultimately over God. [Romans 3:4](#) says,

Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.

What is supremely at stake in all of this is the recognition of the **authority of God over our lives.** By affirming the inerrancy of Scripture, in essence we are placing ourselves under the authority of **ALL** of Scripture. Whenever the issue of inerrancy is discussed, the very nature of the inerrancy of Scripture also states that Scripture is **authoritative.** And for the most part, it is the authority of Scripture that men want to undermine.

The ultimate question that we have to ask is whether or not the Bible that we have, the **translation** that we are using, is accurate, and did it use the proper manuscripts. Let me state in a very elementary, simple

way how we got our Bible - **God delivered His divine message to men and they wrote it down.** That manuscript (**autograph**), or letter, was completely inerrant. It was the original, but there was only ONE original written, and anything and everything since that time has been a copy of the original that was passed down from generation to generation. Look at it this way:



The text of the Bible is the best attested of any ancient writings, and we are confident that we have the original words of Scripture. There are literally tens of thousands of ancient copies of Scripture – some whole, and some in part. We have over 6,000 New Testament manuscripts from as early as the 2nd century, and many thousands of the Old Testament. No document before the invention of the printing press was more carefully copied than the Old Testament manuscripts.

For instance, Paul would write a letter to a church or to an individual like Timothy. For the church at Ephesus, as an example, he gave the letter to Timothy to take to be read in that church. However, we must keep in mind that there was only one original letter from Paul to Timothy. That was it. So, the church would make copies of that letter - what are called the “autographs”, and pass it down to other churches in other cities. They would take a copy for Philippi, for Thessalonica, for churches in Galatia. And then those churches would make copies and pass them to other churches in their regions as well. Because the original was copied, obviously scribal errors were sometimes made in the copies. So, over the centuries, the more than 6000 copies of New Testament manuscripts and letters have been scrutinized and compared with each other to make sure that we have a copy that is the same as the original.

We can take any of the New Testament books - say Romans. Let us just say that we have over 100 copies, or manuscripts, of that writing. In one of the manuscripts the person making the copy used the word “righteous”, but the other 99 copies used the word “righteousness”. The textual experts would therefore conclude that the one manuscript was in error, but the other 99 had used the correct word. So, any error made by the person making the copy could easily be identified and resolved. So, in the end, we know that we have both accurate Hebrew and Greek texts that reflect exactly what was written in the original manuscripts. **THE ORIGINAL TEXTS FOR BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS HAVE BEEN FULLY PRESERVED.** The original text is what is used to make a Bible translation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lloyd-Jones, 616.

² Lloyd-Jones, 617.

³ Lloyd-Jones, 619.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Life in Christ - Studies in 1 John*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2002.