

Theme: - The Testimony of God

Today I'm preaching on 1 John 5:9 to 13, which starts, "If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater." What does that mean, and apart from the obvious, what makes God's testimony greater, and finally why did John write that?

Behind this first verse John has two basic ideas. Firstly, John speaks a lot about witnesses in his gospel, in chapter 1 verse 15 John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus, and in the first 12 verses of chapter 2 Jesus' sign of turning water into wine was again a witness to Jesus.

In John 15 verse 26, we read, "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father he will testify about me".

These are but three examples of people or instances which bear witness to Jesus being the Son of God.

Secondly in Deuteronomy 19 verse 15 there is a law stipulating the minimum number of witnesses, verse 15 reads, "A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be brought."

Now St John of course was a Jew and was brought up as a Jew, and he would be fully aware of the requirements for witnesses.

And in Matthew's gospel Jesus said as recorded at chapter 18 verse 16, "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

So, for anything to be accepted as true there had to be, in Jewish law, at least two or three witnesses to collaborate the story.

So, for me John is saying that when it comes to God's testimony, and using the formula in Deuteronomy verse 15, we have the trinity of God; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, so God's testimony is always supported by two witnesses, the Son and the Spirit therefore God's testimony is always true, or as John put it, 'greater'.

God's message of love expounded in John's gospel and in John's first letter to fellow Christians which we have been exploring over these last few weeks is true, it is true because as John has written in the second half of verse 9, "This is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son."

And as we read the Bible and pray, we learn about God and God's love for us, and we learn to accept that God's testimony is true. His words are something we can count on. They are true, so let us believe it.

But why did he write that? There were people both in the church and outside the church at that time who disputed the teaching of the church, they just couldn't believe that Jesus was both the Son of God, that is divine, and a normal human being.

They taught an alternative gospel, not based on God's word but on their own word, and they were influencing many people, and something had to be done.

Now St John of course was a witness to Christ, he was one of the first disciples, he had walked with Jesus for two years or more, he knew Jesus intimately, and he was determined to put an end to the heretical doctrine by writing his letter.

And there is a message for us here as well, because if someone says something to you, and you say to yourself, 'That jars with my understanding, or I'm not sure about that', then please do not ignore what you heard but read the Bible prayerfully and compare what was said with the Bible passage, because God's word is always true.

In John chapter 14 verse 26 Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things."

The truth is that all of us have access to the Holy Spirit and we can all learn the truth about God by reading the Bible for ourselves, because the Holy Spirit will guide all of us and teach us all things when we read the Bible prayerfully.

I don't like 'teach yourself' books, which I personally could never get on with, I need somebody to tell me and to explain things to me, so asking the Holy Spirit to explain things as we read the Bible is the key to understanding what God is saying through the text that we are reading.

Verse 10 goes further by saying, "Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts".

Now John quite often writes in his gospel, "believe **in** the Son of God", and he writes it here in verse 10 as well, and there is a world of difference between believing a man and believing **in** a man.

To believe a man we do no more than accept what he said at that moment as true.

If we believe in a man, we accept the whole man and all he stands for in complete trust. We would be prepared not only to trust what he said, but also trust ourselves to him.

To believe **in** Jesus Christ is to believe everything he says and to commit ourselves into his hands for eternity. It also means that we who believe and trust in Jesus Christ have God's testimony embedded in our very being and God's testimony becomes the foundation of everything we do and believe in.

When we have God's testimony in our hearts we are inspired to look after and to love our planet with all its animals, birds and plants, it inspires us to love our neighbours as ourselves; God's testimony directs every facet of our lives, it directs the way we behave and becomes our hope for our future.

It is impossible to have God's testimony in our hearts and then to go out and steal or harm somebody. The violence of knife crime and general lawlessness is the direct result of the absence of God in their lives.

In the second half of verse 10 John states that those who do not believe in God's testimony have made him out to be a liar: very strong words from St John. Earlier in John's letter he wrote that those who claim to be without sin are also calling God a liar.

In using the word liar John is stressing the seriousness of the attitude people take to the denial of God's testimony. One may be forgiven who have never heard God's testimony or understood it, but those who have heard and understand but still deny it, may not be forgiven.

We need to read verse 11 with the first section of verse 12; so, in verse 11 John explains what the testimony is he's referring too, which is that "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son", and the first section of verse 12 reads, "Whoever has the Son has life."

Eternal life is not something we inherit after we die, it is something we inherit when we believe and trust in Christ as our Lord and saviour, sometimes we hear in our intercessions the phrase, 'death is but the gateway to heaven', and that is all it is; it is not the start of eternal life, that came with belief and trust in Christ as Lord and saviour.

We who believe and trust in Christ as our saviour are in eternal life in the here and now, and John defines it as 'in Christ', which is why I, and I'm sure you as well, have such joy in Christ in our day to day lives.

Finally, the second part of verse 12, "Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." John is saying that those who do not believe and trust in Christ as their Lord and saviour are not in eternal life.

Such people do not believe in Christ as their saviour either because they haven't heard the good news of Christ or they have heard it but didn't understand it, which is why it is so essential to be a mission-based church, because everyone who does not have Christ in their lives are lost to Christ which is a tragedy for them and an indictment of us.

Mission is not only something that others do who are given the title of 'missionary', but for everyone who are in Christ, it is for all of us, and from my experience, the easiest place to start is with your own family, especially your own children.

Revd. John White