



*To Know Christ . . .  
and to Make Him Known*

Wilmington, North Carolina  
Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, *Senior Pastor*  
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### The Ultimate Test 1 John 5:1-13

Imagine, if you will, a cosmic courtroom scene.

It's Jesus Christ who is on trial. The accusations have to do with His identity, who He really is. Several witnesses have already given their testimonies.

They all *claim* to be followers of Jesus. They've all been involved in His church, the community of His followers. Some of them have even been teachers in the church.

Yet in one way or another, they have all denied to one degree or another that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, or else that He has come in the flesh, if He is indeed divine.

And now some of them, unable to persuade the church of their views, have left, professing to be following a greater understanding or revelation.

Now the implications of their accusations against Jesus are significant.

Though they may have acknowledged that Jesus was somehow the Son of God in the flesh during His earthly life *after* His baptism, they believed that whatever divine part there was in Him left just before His crucifixion, and that He in some fashion returned to His pre-baptismal state. In other words, according to them, the incarnation of Christ—God's coming in the flesh—*began* with Jesus' baptism and *ended* just prior to His crucifixion. After all, they reasoned, how in the world could *God* die?

If what they are saying is true, then what the early church has been saying about Jesus is a lie.

But now, God is on the witness stand. Now God Himself is giving *His* testimony.

He points to the historical facts about Jesus.

After Jesus came into the world and grew to be a man, He came one day to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River. When John baptized Him, as He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit of God descended on Him in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven—God's voice—declared, "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased**" (Matthew 3:17).<sup>1</sup>

That was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. But God also points to the end of it, the end of His earthly life, when He was put to death on a cross. God says that His Son not only came by the water (His baptism), but also by the blood (His suffering and death). He was a real, live human being (5:6). When they beat Him, He bled. When they thrust the crown of thorns on His brow, real blood streamed down His face. When they drove the nails through His hands and feet, the flesh tore and the blood flowed. And when the soldier thrust the spear in His side, blood and water poured forth. He really was the Son of God *in the flesh*.

But according to God's testimony, this reality continues on beyond His death, and even beyond His resurrection. Those who have followed Him have experienced Him as the risen Lord.

In His resurrection existence, He is *still* truly human *and* truly divine, *still* God in the flesh, although in His resurrected, glorified human state. And those who have trusted in Him have this testimony *in them*. They have experienced firsthand the reality of the Incarnation!<sup>2</sup>

*That* is God's testimony, plain and simple, as John describes it in this letter (7-9). The question is, what will we do with it?

### ***The choice we all have to make . . .***

In our lives, we often encounter a lot of gray area. Sometimes things just are not black and white. There are options.

Sometimes we have to choose between the greater of two goods, or between the lesser of two evils. Sometimes we make our choices based on practicalities rather than principles. Sometimes we try to remain neutral. But when it comes to God's testimony that simply won't cut it.

It *is* black and white. God has said about His Son what God has said about His Son. Not all the details are clear, and there are some reasonable differences in our understandings about some things in God's revelation in Christ. But God's testimony that Jesus is His Son come in the flesh to save us from our sins is absolutely clear and without question!

It's not a matter of the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils. It involves both principle and the ultimate practicality.

*And no one can remain neutral* on this issue.

Either we believe God's testimony about Jesus, or we don't. There is no third option, no middle ground, no disinterested indifference.

In fact, in verse 10 John rather bluntly says that the one who does not believe God's testimony has made God out to be a liar, because that person hasn't believed the testimony God has given about His Son. That sounds pretty serious to me!

But isn't John right? I mean, isn't God's testimony greater than human testimony? So if we accept human testimony, then shouldn't we all the more readily accept and believe God's testimony?

What more can we ask for? The Spirit, the water, and the blood all agree in what they say about Jesus! That fulfills the Old Testament standard of two or three witnesses confirming something (Deuteronomy 19:15). That's been a principle of jurisprudence for thousands of years!

The historical facts are there, and those who believe God's testimony and trust Christ have that testimony confirmed to them in their experience with Him!

According to John, that testimony has eternal significance for us as human beings. In it, God says that He **has given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son**. Doesn't it follow, then, as John puts it, that the one **who has the Son has the life**, and the one **who does not have the Son of God does not have the life** (5:11-12)?

### ***Testing our claims . . .***

When you look at 1 John closely, one of its major themes has to do with indicators or *tests* of who in the churches John was writing to were genuine believers.

In the first two chapters, John says that those who really walk in the light, confessing their own sins, trusting in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for forgiveness, and obeying God's commandments are the real believers. As he understands it, the essence of God's commandments is to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, our fellow Christians. If we hate our fellow Christians, we're still walking in darkness; if we love them, we're walking in the light, obeying God, doing His will.

In chapter three, John marvels at the awesome love that God **the Father has bestowed on us**—that we should be called **children of God**. He reminds us that as God’s children, we should bear a family likeness as we’re becoming like Him. Instead of practicing lawlessness and sin as our way of life, we practice righteousness, living as Jesus did on earth. John emphasizes in chapter four that the essence of this righteous way of life is love for one another—the kind of love Jesus has shown us as He laid down His life for us so that we might have life in Him.

Then here in our text in 5:1-6, John pulls all these tests together—belief in Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah), love for the Father and for one another as His children, obedience to His commands, and overcoming the world.

These are the tests along the way of whether a person is truly a follower of Christ, if a person really has eternal life. These are the things that indicate on a daily basis whether a person is truly a Christian.

Many years ago when I was a student at Campbell University, I took a course with Dr. Jerry Wallace. At that time he was chair of the Department of Religion and Philosophy. He later became the Academic Dean, then Provost, and eventually President of the University.

At the beginning of almost every class period, Dr. Wallace would say, “The Rule of the Evaluator is now in effect.” That meant: clear off your desk, take out a clean sheet of paper, and number from 1 to 5. He then asked five questions about the reading assigned for that class. It was his way of monitoring how we were doing on a weekly basis. The two or three periodic tests showed how we were doing along the way on each section of the course. And then the final exam was the ultimate test of what we had learned during the semester.

Up through 5:6, John has given us the evaluators and the periodic tests. But now in verses 9-12 he gives us the final exam, the *ultimate test*.

This is the big one. It’s the one that only I can answer for myself, and only you can answer for yourself. It’s the very essence of that doctrine we call justification by faith. And it’s simply this: Do I believe God and His testimony about His Son Jesus Christ, and thus have His Son?

It’s that simple! *Whether we believe God about His Son is the ultimate test of whether we have eternal life.*

John says that’s how we *know* we have eternal life. If we believe God, we believe that He has given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. If we believe Him, we’ll trust Him. If we trust him, we’ll have His Son. And the one who has the Son has eternal life. But the one who doesn’t have the Son does not have the life.

Back in 2003, our state celebrated the Festival of Flight, commemorating one hundred years of powered flight. Those Wright brothers really believed they could fly—that if they would just implement the laws of aerodynamics, they could get that primitive plane off the ground. And they did!

Aerodynamics amaze me—I understand the basic principles, but it’s so hard sometimes to understand how or even believe that a plane, especially the ones that are so huge, can fly! But I believe it. I’ve seen it.

Yet the ultimate test of whether I believe it, whether I really believe the pilot can take that plane up in the air and fly it, comes down to this: Will I get on the plane?

**And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (1995 edition).

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Talbert's *Reading John* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) was helpful in my interpretation of this text.

<sup>3</sup> My translation.