

1 John 5:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

Analysis

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. John argues from lesser to greater. "If we receive the witness of men" (ei tēn martyrian tōn anthrōpōn lambanomen)—we routinely accept human testimony in daily life. Courts rely on witnesses, we believe testimony about events we didn't see, commerce depends on trusting others' word. Human testimony, though fallible, serves as basis for decisions and beliefs.

"The witness of God is greater" (hē martyria tou theou meizōn estin)—how much more reliable is divine testimony! God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18), is omniscient (knowing all truth), and is omnipotent (able to ensure His testimony reaches us). If we trust imperfect human witnesses, how much more should we trust God's perfect witness? This is an a fortiori argument—from the lesser accepted truth to the greater certain truth.

"For this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son" (hoti autē estin hē martyria tou theou hēn memartyrēken peri tou huiou autou). The perfect tense indicates God's testimony is complete with continuing validity. God testified through the Father's voice at Jesus's baptism and transfiguration, through Christ's miracles and resurrection, through the Spirit's witness, and through apostolic preaching. This comprehensive divine testimony about Christ provides unshakeable foundation for faith. Rejecting God's testimony about His Son is

incomparably more serious than rejecting human testimony—it effectively calls God a liar (v. 10).

Historical Context

The reliability of testimony was central to ancient jurisprudence and philosophy. Greek philosophers debated epistemology—how we know truth. Skeptics questioned all knowledge; others accepted testimony as valid knowledge source. John builds on common sense—we necessarily rely on testimony. He then argues that God's testimony is supremely reliable, being omniscient and truthful.

Jewish tradition emphasized God's witness through Scripture, prophets, and mighty acts. The apostles proclaimed themselves eyewitnesses but grounded their authority in God's commissioning. Early Christian apologetics used fulfilled prophecy, miracles, and the resurrection as God's testimony to Christ. This objective divine witness complemented subjective Spirit's testimony, providing both external and internal certainty.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that you routinely accept human testimony make rejecting God's testimony about Christ inconsistent and unreasonable?
2. What specific elements of God's testimony about His Son (Scripture, miracles, resurrection, Spirit's witness) provide your strongest assurance?
3. If God's witness is infinitely more reliable than human witness, how should this affect your confidence in biblical testimony about Christ?

Interlinear Text

εἰ τὴν μαρτυρία τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν ἡ
If the witness of men we receive G3588
G1487 G3141 G3588 G444 G2983 G3588

μαρτυρία τοῦ Θεοῦ μείζων ἐστὶν ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ
the witness of God greater is for this is G3588
G3141 G3588 G2316 G3187 G2076 G3754 G3778 G2076 G3588

μαρτυρία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἦν μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ
the witness of God which he hath testified of Son
G3141 G3588 G2316 G3739 G3140 G4012 G3588 G5207

αὐτοῦ

G846

Additional Cross-References

Acts 17:31 (Parallel theme): Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Matthew 17:5 (Parallel theme): While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Hebrews 2:4 (Witness): God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

1 John 5:10 (Witness): He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

John 10:38 (Parallel theme): But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

