

The Three Witnesses

A Sermon

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“There are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”¹ [John 5:8](#).

CHRISTIANITY PUTS FORTH very lofty claims. She claims to be the true faith, and the only true one. She avows her teachings to be divine, and therefore infallible; while for her great Teacher, the Son of God, she demands divine worship, and the unreserved confidence and obedience of men. Her commands are issued to every creature, and though at present her authority is rejected by millions of mankind, she confidently looks forward to a time when truth shall obtain universal dominion, and Jesus the Lord shall take unto himself his great power and reign.

Now, to justify such high claims, the gospel ought to produce strong evidence, and it does so. It does not lack for external evidences, these are abundant, and since many learned men have spent their lives in elaborating them, there is less need for me to attempt a summary of them. In these days scarce a stone is turned over among yonder eastern reins which does not proclaim the truth of the word of God, and the further men look into either history or nature, the more manifest is the truth of scriptural statements. The armoury of external evidences is well stored with weapons of proof. The gospel also bears within itself its own evidence, it has a self-proving power. It is so pure, so holy, so altogether above the inventive capacity of fallen man, that it must be of God. But neither with these external or internal evidences have we to do this morning, but I call your attention to the three witnesses which are spoken of in the text, three great witnesses still among us, whose evidence proves the truth of our religion, the dinning, of our Lord, and the future supremacy of the faith. Our text speaks of three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood: may the Holy Ghost who is our Interpreter, lead us into the full meaning of this very, remarkable passage.

I. I shall note, first, that OUR LORD HIMSELF WAS ATTESTED BY THESE THREE WITNESSES. If you will carefully read in the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Exodus, or in the eighth chapter of the Book of Leviticus, you will see that when a priest was ordained (and a priest was a type of Christ) three things were always used: he was washed with water in every case, a sacrifice was brought, and his ear, his thumb, and his toe were touched with blood, and then he was anointed with oil, in token of that unction of the Spirit with which the coming High Priest of our profession would be anointed. So that every priest came by

the anointing Spirit, by water, and by blood, as a matter of type, and if Jesus Christ be indeed the priest that was for to come, he will be known by these three signs.

Godly men in the olden times also well understood that there was no putting away of sin except with these three things; in proof of which we will quote David's prayer, 'Purge me with hyssop' that is, the hyssop dipped in blood and I shall be clean; wash me there is the water and I shall be whiter than snow; and then, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.' Thus the blood, the water, and the Spirit were recognized of old as necessary to cleanse from guilt, and if Jesus of Nazareth be indeed able to save his people from their sins, he must come with the triple gift the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Now it was evidently so.

Our Lord was attested by *the Spirit*. The Spirit of God bore witness to Christ in the types and prophecies, 'Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;' and Jesus Christ answers to those prophecies as exactly as a well-made key answers to the wards of a lock. By the power of the Holy Spirit our Lord's humanity was fashioned and prepared for him, for the angel said unto Mary, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' When our Lord in due time commenced his public ministry, the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, and rested upon him, and a voice was heard from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' This was indeed one of the surest seals of our Lord's Messiahship, for it had been given by the Spirit of prophecy unto John as a token upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.' The Spirit abode in our Lord without measure, throughout his whole public career, so that he is described as full of the Spirit and led of the Spirit. Hence his life and ministry were full of power. How truthfully he said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind.' Well said Peter, 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing an that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him.' Mighty signs and miracles were the witness of the divine Spirit to the mission of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit abode with our Lord all his life long, and to crown all, after he had died and risen again, the Holy Ghost gave the fullest witness by descending in full power upon the disciples at Pentecost. The Lord had promised to baptise his disciples with the Holy Ghost, and they tarried at Jerusalem in expectation of the gift: nor were they disappointed, for on a sudden 'they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' Those cloven tongues of fire, and the 'rushing mighty wind,' were sacred tokens that he who had ascended was Lord and God. The apostles said, 'We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that

obey him.’ The word of the apostles, through the Holy Spirit, convinced men ‘of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,’ as the Master had foretold; and then the Spirit comforted the penitents, and they believed in the exalted Savior and were baptised the selfsame day. The words of Jesus were abundantly fulfilled,”When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.’ Thus from our Lord’s birth, throughout his life, and after his ascension, the Holy Ghost bore conspicuous witness to him.

It is also manifest that our Lord came with *water* too. I have shown you that every priest was washed with water; our Lord was not unclean, and therefore one would have thought he might dispense with this; but to ‘fulfill all righteousness’ his first step was to be washed in Jordan by the hands of John the Baptist, coming thus to the door of his ministry by that baptism in water which indicates that by death, burial, and resurrection, he was about to save his people. As soon as that baptism had been accomplished, ay, and before that, you could see that he had come with *water*, for by *water* is signified that clean, pure, hallowed life which the outward washing was meant to typify. His first years of obscurity were years of holiness, and his after years of service were spotless. ‘In him was no sin.’ Who ever exercised a ministry so pure as his? Where else find we such immaculate holiness? He came not by the *water* merely as a symbol, but by that which the *water* meant, by unsullied purity of life. His doctrine was as pure as his example. Point me to a single syllable of all his teaching which would create, foster, or excuse sin! He was the friend of sinners, but not the apologist for their sins. His tenderness to sinners was that of a physician whose aim is to remove the disease. His whole doctrine is fitly comparable to purifying and life-giving *water*, and it operated upon men’s hearts in that manner. In this last sense especially he came by *water*. It is very remarkable how John’s Gospel is both the exposition and the text of John’s First Epistle, for if you turn to it you find our Lord Jesus coming by *water* at the outset of his teaching. To Nicodemus he says a man must be ‘born of *water* and of the Spirit;’ to the woman of Samaria he speaks at large of ‘living *water*;’ and on the great day of the feast he vies, ‘If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink.’ In his ministry he not only issued the invitation, but to all who believed on him he gave of the *water* of the fountain life freely. Thus our Lord came by *water* in the sense of communicating a new; pure, and purifying life to men; for the *water* is the Emblem of the new life which springs up within the soul of believers, a life fresh and sparkling, leaping up from the eternal fountains of the divine existence; a life which will flow on for ever, and widen and deepen like Ezekiel’s river, and increase in fullness of power and joy until it unites with the ocean of immortal bliss. Jesus came to pour forth this living flood among the sons of men. Blessed be his name!

Our Lord closed his life with washing his disciples’ feet, a fit conclusion to a life which had by its example been cleansing throughout, and still remains as the grandest corrective of the corrupt examples of the world. Even after death our Lord retained the instructive

symbol by giving forth from his pierced heart water as well as blood, which John evidently thought very significant; for when he wrote concerning it he said, 'He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.' So that from the Jordan to the cross both the symbol and the substance were with our great Master, while his own personal purity, and his gift of life to others, proved his mission to be from above.

With Jesus also was *the blood*. This distinguished him from John the Baptist, who came by water, but Jesus came 'not by water only, but by water and blood.' We must not prefer any one of the three witnesses to another, but what a wonderful testimony to Christ was the blood! From the very first he came with blood, for John the Baptist cried, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' Now, the lamb which takes away sin is a slaughtered lamb, a bleeding lamb; so that at the time when the baptismal waters were upon him, John saw that he must bleed for human sin. In his ministry there was often a clear testimony to his future sufferings and shedding of blood, for to the assembled crowd he said, 'Except a man eat my flesh and drink my blood, there is no life in him:' while to his disciples he spake of the decease which he should shortly accomplish at Jerusalem. Then at the last, taking all our sins upon his shoulders, in the agony of Gethsemane, the blood bore witness that he was indeed the Lamb of God, and on yonder tree where he

'Bore all incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, but none to spare,'

disinterestedly dying for his enemies, unselfishly suffering an ignominious doom that he might redeem those who had rejected and scoffed at him, his invincible love triumphed over death itself, and endured divine wrath without repining, as none but the Son of God could have done. Now Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself; he was to make his soul an offering for sin, he was to make his grave with the wicked, and lie in the heart of the earth. The blood of the covenant was to be shed, the paschal victim was to be slain, the Shepherd was to be smitten, the Lamb was to be led to the slaughter, and therefore only by the shedding of his blood could Jesus prove himself to be the Messiah so long foretold. However pure the life he led, had he never died he could not have been the Savior appointed to bear the iniquity of us all. The blood was needed to complete the witness. The blood must now with the water, the suffering with the serving. The most pious example would not have proved him to be the divine Shepherd, if he had not laid down his life for the sheep. Take away the atonement, and Jesus is no more than any other prophet, the essential point of his mission is gone. It is evident that he who was to come was to finish transgression, and to make reconciliation for iniquity. Now, this could not be done except by an expiation, and as Jesus has made such an expiation by his own blood, we know him to be the Christ of God. His blood is the seal of his mission, the very life of his work.

I have thus shown that our Lord himself was attested by these three sacred witnesses.

II. Now, secondly, may God the Holy Spirit help me to show that THESE THREE REMAIN AS STANDING WITNESSES TO HIM TO ALL TIME.

And first, *the Holy Spirit* is witness at this hour that the religion of Jesus is the truth, and that Jesus is the Son of God. I say not that he bears such witness everywhere, for there are many that preach in the wisdom of men, and in carnal excellency of speech, and God the Holy Ghost does not work with them, because he hath chosen other instruments. I do not say that he bears witness to the truth when it is defiled by a lukewarm ministry, and a prayerless church: but I do say this, that the Spirit of God, wherever Jesus is fully preached, is the great witness to the truth of his word; for what does he do? By his divine energy he convinces men of the truth of the gospel: and these so convinced are not only persons who, through their education are likely to believe it, but men like Saul of Tarsus who abhor the whole thing. He pours his influences upon men, and infidelity melts away like the iceberg in the Gulf Stream; he touches the indifferent and careless, and they repent, believe, and obey the Savior. He makes proud men tremble, and wicked men quake for fear. The conversions which are wrought where Christ is truly preached are the miracles which attest the truth of the gospel. He who can make the harlot to be chaste, the drunkard to be sober, the thief to be honest, the malicious to be forgiving, the covetous to be generous, and above all the self-righteous to be humble, is indeed the Christ of God, and when the Spirit does all this and more by the gospel, he bears conclusive witness to the power of the cross.

Then, too, the Spirit goes forth among believers, and by them he bears witness to our Lord and his gospel. Great is the variety of his operations, for which cause he is called the Seven Spirits of God; but in each one he witnesses to Jesus; whether he quickens, consoles, enlightens, refreshes, sanctifies, anoints, or inflames the soul, he does it always by taking the things of Christ and revealing them to us. How mightily does he comfort the saints! Have you not been consoled by him in deep distress? Have you not endured the loss of dear ones without repining, because your heart has been sustained by the Comforter? Now, that wondrous influence which wrought peace in you through the gospel, must have confirmed you in the belief of the truth: and others who have seen your serenity under heavy trial, if they are not convinced, at least are led to inquire what strange thing is this which makes the Christian suffer without repining. The Spirit bears witness to Christ, then, when he comforts the saints.

And he does the same when he gives them guidance, enlightenment and elevation of soul I will, however, for a moment, dwell upon 'utterance.' Some reject the idea, but for all that it is true that in the selfsame hour it is given to God's servants to speak in his name. Look at the martyr times! How wondrously feeble women like Anne Askew baffled all their foes! How ignorant weavers stood up before bishops and doctors and confounded them! Even now, in answer to prayer, the Spirit comes upon chosen men who yield themselves to his influence. And bears them along with a whirlwind, making them eloquent in the divine

sense, speaking out of their hearts that which God gives them to deliver. Some of us know this, for we have cast ourselves upon that eternal Spirit, and thoughts have been given us, and mouth and utterance also. By this also the Spirit bears witness to the truth of our faith.

I have not time to go into all the operations of the Spirit, only let me say that his sustaining, his consoling influences have been very especially seen in persecuting times. Men of God have been subjected to tortures which our mind finds it painful to dwell upon, yet they have not been vanquished by their foes; neither nakedness, nor peril, nor sword have separated them from the love of God. Blandina tossed in a net by a wild bull, and burned with hot plates of brass, wearies out her tormentors; and Lawrence, on his gridiron, finds joy enough for mirth. One cries aloud amid the flames, 'None but Jesus,' and another claps his blazing hands and shouts victory as his soul quits the body. The Spirit of God in the church has preserved her amid persecutions furious and long-continued, filling the saints with a dauntless courage and a serene invincibility which has both amazed and alarmed their enemies. So mightily has this patience convinced the world, that it has passed into a proverb, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'

With equal power does the Spirit of God bear witness to the gospel in great revivals of religion. How wondrously did the Spirit of God testify to Christ during the Reformation! Scarcely had Luther opened his mouth to proclaim the good news than straightway men received it eagerly; they sang psalms as they ploughed the field or threw the shuttle; the precious word was in all men's mouths. They said that angels carried Luther's writings all over the world: it was not so, but the ever-blessed Spirit makes the truth to fly like flames of fire. So was it in Whitfield's day, and in many revivals which we have read of, and some which we have seen. Sometimes men have been struck down and convulsed, and at other times, without outward violence, they have been with equal power renewed in their souls. Who that has been at Edinburgh, and seen many hundreds of people rushing through the streets to one appointed meeting-place, to fall on their knees and cry for mercy all at once, could doubt but what the gospel must be true? The Spirit of God, omnipotent in the realm of spirits, and able to guide the human will without violating it, has enlightened men's darkened minds and made them see that Jesus Christ is God and Savior. Overwhelmed by the love of Jesus, they have yielded at once to his commands, A formal church, with a minister to stand up and talk officially, and a people who come and go mechanically, bears no witness to religion, but rather creates infidels; but where we see what some have called 'real Methodist fire,' and others 'the old Protestant enthusiasm,' or, rather, where we see the Holy Ghost, attended by marvellous conversion, deep repentance, singular illumination, the angelic and general love, we have indisputable evidence of the divinity of our faith.

The next abiding witness in the church is *the water*—not the water of baptism, but the new life implanted in Christians, for that is the sense in which John's Master had used the word 'water': 'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up

unto everlasting life.' Where the Spirit of God comes he creates in the man a new nature, pure, bright, fresh, vigorous, like a fountain, and the fact that this new nature does exist in multitudes of men is a standing evidence that the gospel is true, for no other religion makes men new creatures, no other religion even pretends to do it; they may propose to improve the old nature, but none of them can say, 'Behold, I make all things new.' This is the sole prerogative of Jesus our Lord.

The existence of the new life is matter of fact. We ourselves know many whose lives are pure and blameless; they have faults before God, but before the eyes of men they are perfect and upright, blameless and harmless. The godly lives of Christians are good evidence of the truth of the gospel. Did I hear some one object, 'But many professors of Christianity are not holy'? I grant you it, but then everybody knows that they are inconsistent with the religion which they profess. If I heard of a lustful Mahomedan I should not consider him inconsistent with Mahomedanism; is he not allowed his harem? If I heard of a licentious Hindoo, I should not consider him to be dishonoring his religion, for some of its sacred rites are disgusting and unmentionable. The same may be said of all the idolatries. But everybody knows that if a man professes to be a Christian and he is guilty of a gross fault, the world rings with the scandal, because it recognizes the inconsistency of his conduct with his profession. Though some may at the first breath of a slander blazon it abroad and say, 'This is your religion,' the world knows it is not our religion, but the want of it. Why do they themselves make such a wonder of a fallen professor? Are adulterers so very scarce that such a noise should be made when a minister is, truly or falsely, charged with the crime? The world's conscience knows that the religion of Jesus is the religion of purity, and if professed Christians fall into uncleanness the world knows that such a course of action does not arise out of the religion of Christ, but is diametrically opposite to it. The gospel is perfect, and did we wholly yield to its sway sin would be abhorred by us, and slain in us, and we should live on earth the life of the perfect ones above. Oh, may God produce in his church more and more the witness of the new life, the testimony of holiness, love, meekness, temperance, godliness, and grace: these are the gospel's logic, its syllogisms and demonstrations, which none can refute.

The third abiding witness is *the blood*. The blood of Christ is still on the earth, for when Jesus bled it fell upon the ground and was never gathered up. O earth, thou still art bespattered with the blood of the murdered Son of God, and if thou cost reject him this will curse thee. But, O humanity, thou art blessed with the drops of that precious blood, and believing in him it doth save thee. Now, does the blood really save from guilt, terror, and despair? Does it operate among men? Let us our memory. Its answer is clear and full. I speak what I do know, and testify what I have seen. I have preached the blood of Jesus Christ and the love of the incarnate God, and I have seen proud, stout-hearted men shed tears in floods; the rock has wept when smitten with this wondrous rod of the cross. Men who could resist thee thunders of Sinai have melted before the tender notes of Calvary. Ay, and, on the other

hand, I have seen the desponding, whose soul chose strangling rather than life, look up to that dear cross, and their faces have been brightened, and a joy unspeakable has chased away despair. Miracles of consolation the blood has wrought. We have seen men at war with God, and opposed to holiness, to whom the blood has spoken; they have seen a God reconciled to them, and they have been reconciled to him themselves. We have seen them beneath the spell of the blood throw down their weapons and cry'

'I yield, by Jesus' love subdued,'

Who can resist its charms?'

And throw myself to be reserved

Into my Savior's arms.'

The blood of Jesus, after speaking peace to the conscience, inflames the heart with fervent love, and full often leads men to high deeds of consecration, self-denial, and self-sacrifice, such as can scarce be understood till they are traced back to that amazing love which bled upon the tree. Well might the martyrs bleed for him who was crucified for them; the blood is working mightily in men to will and to do for the glory of God. Yes, brethren, the blood has such a melting, such a converting, such a subduing, such a sanctifying, such a joy-creating power to every conscience which hears its matchless voice, that it remains, with the Spirit and the water, a convincing witness to the Christ of God.

III. In the third place, let us observe that THIS TRIPLE YET UNITED WITNESS IS PECULIARLY FORCIBLE WITHIN BELIEVING HEARTS. John tells us, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.' Now, brethren, these three witnesses bear testimony in our souls abidingly. I speak not of years ago, but of last night, when you bowed your knee in prayer and prayed, and were heard. Did not the Spirit when he helped you to pray bear witness that the gospel was no lie? Was not the answer to your prayer good evidence? And that Sabbath morning, when you prayed that you might gather up your thoughts and forget the week's cares, and you did so by the Spirit's aid, did not this sacred rest of your soul prove that Christ is indeed a Savior? Sitting here this morning as your soul has burned within you, and your Master has been near you, has not that communion, given you of the Spirit, been to you a fresh witness to Christ? The other day, when you were so sad and the Holy Spirit comforted you, when you were so rebellious, and he made you quiet, even as a weaned child, did not this confirm your faith? The other day when you were so in the dark, and he enlightened you, when you were in such dilemmas and he guided you had you not then fresh evidence that there is a life, a power, a divinity about the gospel? These sweet feelings of yours came to you by the Spirit of God revealing Jesus to you. He did not comfort you nor elevate you by the law, nor by the flesh, but by the love of God shed abroad in your heart, that precious love which comes streaming down from the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord. Ah, dear friends, I feel sick to death of the common talk about the healthiness of doubting and the beauty of 'modern thought.' This talk is only the self-praise of a set of

concealed infidels treacherously lurking in God's church. There is a short way with sceptics which I commend to your use. Ask them 'Do they know the Holy Ghost? Did they ever feel him in their own souls? If they say 'No,' we believe them; let them believe us when we declare that we do feel the operations of the Holy Ghost. There is the end of the controversy; if they are honest so are we, and we are witnesses to the divine working of the Holy Ghost in our own souls. If they never felt his power, their negative statements cannot in the least degree affect the truth of ours.

The next witness in us is *the water*, or the new and pure life. Do you feel the inner life, my brethren? I know you do; you feel it fighting, struggling, contending, sometimes winning the mastery, and at other times captive and groaning; you feel it often aspiring, desiring, hungering, thirsting, yearning, sighing; and sometimes singing, shouting, dancing, and leaping up to heaven. You are conscious that you are not what you used to be, you are conscious of a new life within your soul which you never knew till the date of your conversion, and that new life within you is the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. The fact that you know you are born of God forbids a doubt as to the truth by which you were begotten; the sense that you are forgiven forbids all scepticism as to the fact that Christ is come in the flesh, and that he is the Son of God, and that his gospel is the truth of God. To you all these things are clear.

Witnessing within us is also *the blood*. Beloved, this is a witness which never fails, speaking in us better things than the blood of Abel. It gives us such peace that we can sweetly live and calmly die. It gives us such access to God that sometimes when we have felt its power we have drawn as near to our Father as if we had seen him face to face. And oh, what safety the blood causes us to enjoy! We feel that we cannot perish while the crimson canopy of atonement by blood hangs over our head. What victory it gives us! making us cry, 'Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' These are mysterious sensations, not to be accounted for by fleshly enthusiasm, for they are strongest when we are calmest; not to be accounted for by any natural predilections to such emotions, for we are by nature as easily perturbed as others, and as apt to forget divine things. In times of trial we have looked to Jesus' flowing wounds and we have been comforted, we have found communion with Jesus to be so blessed that we would not envy Gabriel his angelhood.

Now, then, you young men, you need not read 'Paley's Evidences,' the evidence of the Spirit, the water, and the blood is better. You do not grant to study 'Butler's Analogy,' though you may if you please, but such books, excellent as they are, only prove the skin and shell of our religion, and the vital matter is the kernel. If you come by simple prayer, and ask to have the blood of Jesus applied to devour soul, and if the Spirit of God works mightily in your spirit so that you obtain a new inner principle, and lead a new life as the result thereof, you will have the best evidence in the world. You will laugh at doubters, and make a fire of Colenso's objections, and 'Essays and Reviews,' Tyndal's challenge, and Huxley's dreams,

and all that heap of worthless muck which has polluted the church, and defiled the souls of men. O heavens, that ever we should live to see a day in which ministers tell us that it is good to doubt, when poets almost deify that very scepticism of which John says that it makes God a liar, and which therefore is to be denounced as an insult to God, and the curse of the age. Go, fling your doubts away, ye doting men and dreaming women, and bow like penitents at Jesus' feet, and you will find far more than all your fancied learning can bestow. But if ye will not do this, yet know that in vain ye arraign your Maker at your bar, in vain do you re-judge his judgment, and act as if ye were the Gods of God!

Thus I have tried to show that these three witnesses testify in our souls; I beg you now to notice *their order*. These three bear witness in us thus, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; why in this order? Because in this manner they operate. The Spirit of God first enters the heart, perhaps long before the man knows that such is the case; the Spirit creates the new life, which repents and seeks the Savior, that is the water; and that new life flies to the blood of Jesus and obtains peace. The Spirit mightily working, the new life is secretly created, and then faith in the blood is begotten, and the triple witness is complete. We have also found this to be the order of our consolation. I have said to myself, 'Do I know that the Spirit of God is in me?' and I have been afraid that it is not; I have then turned to my inner life, the water, and have not always been certain concerning it, but when I have looked away to the blood, all has been clear enough! Jesus died; I throw myself once again into his arms. When I do not know whether I have the Spirit, and when I am in doubt as to whether I have the living water, I still know that I believe in the blood, and this brings perfect peace.

Having observed their order, now note *their combination*. 'These three agree in one,' therefore every true believer should have the witness of each one, and if each one does not witness in due time, there is cause for grave suspicion. For instance, persons have arisen who have said the Spirit of God has led them to do this and that. Of them we inquire what are your lives? Does the water bear witness? Are you pardoned? Does the blood testify for you? If these questions cannot be answered they may rave as they like about the Spirit of God, but the witness to their salvation is open to the gravest suspicion. We have known some who will say, 'Look at my life, I am very different from what I was. I am a sober, honest, excellent man.' Yes, but do you Test in the blood of Jesus? Practical evidence is good, but it must arise out of faith. If you do not believe in Jesus you have not the essential witness, and your case is not proved. Many also say to us, 'I believe that Jesus died for me,' but we must ask them concerning their lives. Are you cleansed in act? Are you an altered man? For remember, unless the water speaks with the blood, you have not the three-fold testimony. There may be some who say, 'Well, we believe in Jesus, and our lives are changed': but remember, you may say that, but is it so? If so, the Spirit of God has changed you: if you have merely excited yourself into the belief that it is so, or if you were born by your own free will,

you have not the witness, because the truly saved are born not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of the Spirit of God.

The three witnesses agree in one. He believes in pardon by the blood believes also in sanctification by the water; he who rests in Jesus Christ's blood always honors the Spirit of God, and, on the other hand, he that believes in the Holy Ghost values both the inner life and the cleansing blood. God has joined these three together, and let no man put them asunder. The old theologians spake of *baptismus flaminis*, *baptismus fluminis*, and *baptismus sanguinis*. May we know all these, and rejoice in the Spirit, the flood, and the blood.

IV. Lastly, THESE WITNESSES CERTIFY TO US THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF OUR RELIGION. Is *the Spirit* working through the gospel? then the gospel will win the day, because the Spirit of God is Almighty, and complete master over the realm of mind. He has the power to illuminate the intellect, to win the affections, to curb the will, and change the entire nature of man, for he worketh all things after his own pleasure, and, like the wind, he 'bloweth where he listeth.' When he puts forth his omnipotent energy none can stand against him. He has converted three thousand in a day, and he could as readily convert three millions, or three hundred millions. He can do this, and he will. The wind at times blows so gently as scarcely to stir the wing of a butterfly, but at another time it rushes in a tornado, sweeping all before it; do not judge from its soft breath what its full tempest would be, for nothing can stand against the wind when once it speeds forth with power. Let the Spirit of God blow across this land and it will at once drive away the miasmas of superstition, and the clouds of ignorance.

The Holy Spirit is compared to fire. What can resist the energy of fire? There may be so little of it that a cowherd may carry it in his lantern, but lo, it sets a city on a blaze. One match contains all the fire on yonder prairie; it is flung into the dry grass, and lo, the heavens themselves are scorched with the exceeding heat. Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Is anything too hard for the lord? Behold, the universe was chaos once, and the Spirit brooded over it and this fair world came forth: let him in like manner incubate over this chaos of sin, and a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, shall rise therefrom. The gospel must conquer, because the Holy Ghost who works with it is almighty.

Next, the gospel must conquer, because of *the water*, which I have explained to be the new life of purity. What says John? 'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.' It is impossible for the gospel to be vanquished so long as there remains in the world one soul that is born of God. Living and incorruptible seed abideth for ever! Those who would destroy the church only scatter her living seeds, and when Satan raises a hurricane it only bears those seeds further afield. Satan once sat down for weeks together to scheme, and he called in all the devils one by one till Pandemonium all met in one conclave, and what think you came of it all? The Papal Inquisition. They set that horrible machine to work to crush out what they called heresy. They said they would ride up to their saddle girths in the blood of

Lutherans, and they almost redeemed their promise; but their cruelty availed not, the living faith survived, and their murders and infernal cruelties did but stir the world to a groan of sympathy, which helped the progress of the gospel. They cannot destroy the gospel. Do not talk about the Pope of Rome, or the Ritualistic or the infidel party, destroying the gospel church, they can as soon annihilate the Lord himself, because the inner life of Christians is a spark struck from the eternal sun of life, and can never be extinct while God lives.

Lastly, the gospel must spread and conquer because of *the blood*. Has that power? Oh, yes, I will tell you how. God, the everlasting Father, has promised to Jesus by covenant, of which the blood is the seal, that he ‘shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.’ As surely as Christ died on the cross, he must sit on a universal throne. God cannot lie to his Son, cannot mock his wounds, or be deaf to his death-cries, and, therefore, Christ must have what his Father has promised him, and he has said, ‘Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.’ They that bow in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust; for he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet.

Brethren, the inference from all this is, if you are not on Christ’s side it is ill with you, for you will be surely conquered in the battle: but, if you are on Christ’s side, never speak hesitatingly or despondingly. When they bring out a new book to disprove Genesis, and another to evaporate the atonement, do not be afraid. As long as the gospel is in the world the devil will find somebody to write books against it. Take no notice of them, they cannot stand against facts. A philosopher once wrote a book to prove that there is no such thing as matter, and a certain reader believed it till he chanced to knock his head against the bedpost, and then he abandoned the theory. When a man feels the power of the Holy Spirit, or the power of the inner life, he does not care to argue; he has a homespun philosophy of facts which answers his purpose better. Though others may round upon him and say, ‘You are not learned,’ he feels that it does not need learning to prove that which is a matter of personal consciousness, any more than we need proof that sugar is sweet when we have a piece in our mouths. Do you doubt the gospel? Try it! The men who speak against the Bible as a rule have never read it; those who rail against Christ do not know him; and those who deny the efficacy of prayer have never prayed. Nothing is more convincing than fact. Get out of the realm of word-spinning and wind-bag-filling into practical Christian life, proving personally that these things are so, and you will soon be convinced by the blessed witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON¹ [John 5](#).

HYMNS FROM ‘OUR OWN HYMN BOOK’ 335, 451, 331.