COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 38 9 OF 10

One God in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 9 OF 10:

These Three Are One-One Testimony

An overview of God's united testimony concerning His Son.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

Content

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION: THE WITNESS GOD HAS GIVEN OF HIS SON

UNDERSTANDING 1 JOHN 5:6-8

THE JOHANNINE COMMA - WHAT THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE SHOWS

THE SPIRIT, THE WATER AND THE BLOOD

"THESE THREE ARE ONE" - ONE TESTIMONY

THE FATHER, THE WORD AND THE HOLY GHOST

CONCLUSION: "THESE THREE ARE ONE" - ONE TESTIMONY

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

Contact and Links

Website: cogma.com.au

Email: admin@cogma.org.au

Radio COGMA: radiocogma.com

YouTube: youtube.com/@COGMAChannel

Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=61585399471540

SEARCH THIS STUDY GUIDE

Windows: Ctrl + F | Mac: Cmd + F | Phone or tablet: use Search in your PDF reader.

PREFACE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous Study Guide examined Scriptures in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost appear together and established that these expressions must always be understood within the Scriptural foundation that there is one God and one Spirit. We now turn to one of the most frequently discussed Scriptures on this subject: **1 John 5:6-12**.

John speaks of witnesses, record and testimony. In the King James Version, he names the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, and he also speaks of the Spirit, the water and the blood. He then uses the important expressions *"these three are one"* and *"these three agree in one."*

These words have often been used to support the belief that the one God exists as three distinct divine persons. However, we must allow John's own argument to determine what he is teaching. His repeated language concerns those who bear witness, those who bear record, the witness of God concerning His Son and the eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

This Study Guide will therefore examine 1 John 5 carefully and in its complete context. We will consider the textual history of **1 John 5:7**, commonly called the Johannine Comma, the meaning of the Spirit, the water and the blood, the words *"these three are one,"* and the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost as they appear in the King James Version.

Throughout this examination, the foundation remains unchanged. There is one God. The Father is the eternal Spirit, the Word was God and was made flesh, and the Holy Ghost is the same one Spirit of God and of Christ. Nothing in 1 John 5 can be interpreted in a way that overturns these clear Scriptural truths.

The centre of John's testimony is Jesus Christ. John does not lead the reader away from the Son into an abstract definition of God. He leads us to the record God has given concerning His Son and to the saving truth that eternal life is found in Him.

John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

These words give us the direction of the entire Study Guide. The witnesses are important because of the testimony they give, and that testimony centres upon Jesus Christ.

As we examine the Spirit, the water, the blood, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, we must keep John's own purpose before us. The witnesses agree, the record is one, and the saving conclusion is that eternal life is in the Son.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the witnesses in 1 John 5 be understood through God's testimony about His Son?

Personal Reflection

Have you focused so much on the number three that you lost sight of the One being witnessed about?

Action Step

Read **1 John 5:6–12** *as one argument. Explain how you will keep Jesus Christ at the centre of your understanding.*

INTRODUCTION: THE WITNESS GOD HAS GIVEN OF HIS SON

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous Study Guide established that Scriptures mentioning the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost together must remain within the Scriptural foundation that there is one God and one Spirit. That foundation does not change as we now turn specifically to 1 John 5.

John's subject, however, introduces a different emphasis. He is not primarily describing the saving work of God through Jesus Christ and by His Spirit. He is speaking about witness, record and testimony, and asking the reader to receive the testimony God has given concerning His Son.

Before examining the individual witnesses, we must therefore recognise both the foundation that remains unchanged and the particular subject John is now addressing.

One God and One Spirit Remain the Foundation

The New Testament continues to declare the same one God revealed throughout Scripture.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:4**:

> *"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."*

Paul says plainly, *"there is none other God but one."* Scripture is equally clear concerning the Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

There is *"one Spirit"* and *"One God and Father of all."* Therefore, when 1 John 5 speaks of the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, those expressions cannot be separated from what Scripture has already established.

The Father is the eternal Spirit, the Word was God and was made flesh, and the Holy Ghost is the same one Spirit of God and of Christ. These truths remain the foundation as we examine John's language concerning the witnesses.

The Subject Now Changes to Witness and Testimony

Although the one-God foundation remains unchanged, the immediate subject of 1 John 5 is different from many of the Scriptures examined previously. John repeatedly speaks of witness, record, testimony and agreement.

This is important because the meaning of the expressions within the verses must be governed by the subject John himself is discussing.

John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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 tells us directly that he is speaking about *"the witness of God."* He then tells us what that witness concerns: *"his Son."*

The verses must therefore be read as testimony concerning Jesus Christ rather than as an abstract explanation of the internal nature of God. John's concern is the record God has given concerning His Son and whether that testimony will be received.

The Testimony Centres Upon Jesus Christ

This Jesus-centred purpose governs everything that follows. The Spirit bears witness concerning Jesus Christ, while the water and the blood belong within the testimony of cleansing and redemption centred in Him. In the King James Version, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost are described as bearing record.

The witnesses differ, but the subject of their testimony does not. John's argument leads repeatedly back to Jesus Christ and finally to the saving significance of God's record.

John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

John does not conclude his teaching by giving a formula concerning three divine persons. He concludes by declaring that God has given eternal life and that *"this life is in his Son."*

That is the direction in which the entire section moves. The witnesses bear testimony, God gives His record, the testimony concerns His Son, and the saving conclusion is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

With that foundation established, we can now read **1 John 5:6-8** as a complete Scripture section and allow John's own words to determine the meaning of the witnesses he names.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does John's testimony lead to eternal life in the Son?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated eternal life as belonging to a religious statement instead of to Jesus Christ Himself?

Action Step

Reflect on **1 John 5:11–12** *and explain how its record should govern your personal faith in the Son.*

UNDERSTANDING 1 JOHN 5:6-8

BACK TO CONTENTS

We now come to the Scripture section that stands at the centre of this Study Guide. In the King James Version, **1 John 5:6-8** speaks of Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the water and the blood, and also contains the familiar words concerning the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost.

The key to understanding these verses is not to begin by counting the expressions that appear within them. We must first follow John's own argument and identify the subject he is discussing. His language repeatedly centres upon witness, record, testimony and agreement, and all of that testimony concerns Jesus Christ.

Read All Three Verses Together

John wrote in **1 John 5:6-8**:

> *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

Notice the expressions John uses: *"beareth witness," "bear record," "bear witness,"* and *"agree in one."* These expressions tell us what kind of Scripture section we are reading. John is presenting testimony, and the Father, the Word, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, the water and the blood all appear within that framework of witness and record.

We must therefore resist the temptation to detach one phrase from the verses and make it carry a meaning John has not given it. The words *"these three are one"* must remain within the argument in which John placed them.

Jesus Christ Is the Subject

John begins with the words *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ."* The subject is plainly Jesus Christ.

The preceding verse confirms the same context. John wrote in **1 John 5:5**:

> *"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"*

John is speaking about faith in Jesus as the Son of God. He then continues immediately with *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ."* The subject has not changed.

John is establishing the truth concerning Jesus Christ and the testimony God has given concerning Him. The verses do not suddenly leave the Son of God and begin giving an abstract definition of three divine persons within God. This point must control everything that follows because the witnesses are important for what they testify concerning Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Jesus Christ remain the subject when reading **1 John 5:6–8***?*

Personal Reflection

Have you read 'these three are one' without considering the preceding words about Jesus?

Action Step

Compare verses 5–8 and state what you need to correct about the subject of the passage.

The Spirit Bears Witness

John says *"it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."* The Spirit appears in the Scripture section as a witness. John does not simply place the Spirit beside the water and the blood without explanation. He tells us what the Spirit does and why that witness is certain.

The Spirit *"beareth witness"* because *"the Spirit is truth."* The testimony concerning Jesus Christ therefore carries divine certainty. The Spirit does not give a competing message or lead away from Jesus Christ. The Spirit bears true witness concerning Him.

This agrees with the wider testimony of Scripture. The Spirit of truth testifies concerning Jesus Christ, and the witness of the Spirit belongs to the record God has given concerning His Son.

John then continues the language of testimony by saying that there are three that *"bear record in heaven"* and three that *"bear witness in earth."* The number three therefore appears within a structure of witnesses. The number itself does not determine the nature of those witnesses.

A Witness Is Not Automatically a Divine Person

Verse 8 makes this especially clear. John names the Spirit, the water and the blood, and he calls all three witnesses. Yet water is not a divine person, and blood is not a divine person. Therefore, the fact that John speaks of three witnesses cannot by itself establish three divine persons.

John's concern is not simply that there are three. His concern is the testimony they give. He says *"these three agree in one."*

The witnesses are distinguishable, but their witness is united. They are not presenting different Christs, different saving messages or competing truths. They agree in the testimony they bear.

This becomes especially important when we later examine the King James wording of verse 7: *"these three are one."* The meaning of those words cannot be determined by the number

three alone. John has already shown us in verse 8 that distinct witnesses may be spoken of together because they agree in one testimony.

The surrounding argument must therefore determine the sense of the unity.

The Witness of God Concerns His Son

John does not leave us to guess what the testimony concerns. He explains it directly in the verses that follow.

John wrote in **1 John 5:9-10**:

> *"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. 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 repeatedly identifies the subject as *"the witness of God," "his Son,"* and *"the record that God gave of his Son."* This is the controlling explanation of verses 6-8.

John is not asking how many divine persons exist within God. He is establishing the witness God has given concerning Jesus Christ. The witnesses therefore serve the record and point beyond themselves to the truth God has testified concerning His Son.

This also helps us understand why the Spirit, the water and the blood must all remain centred upon Jesus Christ. Whatever each witness means more specifically, its meaning must fit John's stated purpose: the witness God has given of His Son.

We will examine the water and the blood more closely later. For now, the controlling point is already established. Their testimony centres upon Jesus Christ, His cleansing Word and His saving work.

The Record Leads to Eternal Life

John then carries his argument to its saving conclusion. John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Again John says *"this is the record."* He then tells us what that record declares: *"this life is in his Son."*

The whole Scripture section therefore moves in a clear direction. Jesus Christ came by water and blood, the Spirit bears witness, the witnesses agree, God gives His witness concerning His Son, and the believer receives that witness.

The record then reaches its saving conclusion: eternal life is in the Son. The teaching moves from witness to record and from record to life in Jesus Christ.

This is why the witnesses must never become the final subject of the interpretation. John uses them to establish the truth concerning Jesus Christ.

The King James Reading Remains Within the Witness Context

The King James Version includes the words *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."* Because these words appear in the King James Version, we will examine them carefully. We will also consider their textual history in the next section.

However, even before considering the manuscript question, John's language must be noticed. He says *"three that bear record."* The action being described is bearing record.

Therefore, even with the longer King James wording retained exactly as printed, the subject remains testimony. John does not say that three divine persons together constitute one God. He says that three bear record.

The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost must also be understood according to what Scripture has already established. The Father is the eternal Spirit. John says that *"the Word was God,"* and Scripture declares that there is one Spirit.

John wrote in **John 1:1**:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

The Word is not described as another God beside God. John says plainly *"the Word was God."*

Scripture also gives a direct control concerning the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

There is *"one Spirit."* Therefore, the Holy Ghost named in **1 John 5:7** cannot be interpreted as another divine Spirit existing beside the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. The language of the verse must remain within the one-Spirit foundation already established by Scripture.

The water and the blood also require careful treatment. The blood clearly belongs to the genuine humanity and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ because the eternal Spirit does not possess physical blood. The meaning of the water needs closer examination, and John does not explicitly identify the water in these verses as Jesus' baptism.

We should therefore allow the immediate context and the wider testimony of Scripture to guide that question rather than force a conclusion before the evidence has been considered. The fuller meaning of the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost will also be examined later in this Study Guide.

At this stage, the essential point is that their appearance in **1 John 5:7** does not change John's controlling subject of witness and record.

The Main Point Is Already Clear

There are details in this Scripture section that still require careful examination. We must consider the textual history of the longer wording in verse 7, the meaning of the water, how the Spirit, the water and the blood agree in one, and what *"these three are one"* means within John's argument.

Those questions deserve full treatment, and we will address them in turn. But before examining those details, the framework must remain fixed.

John is speaking about Jesus Christ, about witnesses and about the record God has given concerning His Son. That record reaches its saving conclusion in the declaration that eternal life is in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, **1 John 5:6-8** must first be read as a record of united testimony concerning the Son of God. Every witness, every expression and every statement of agreement must remain within that Jesus-centred purpose.

With that foundation established, we can now examine the important textual question surrounding the wording of **1 John 5:7**.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do witnesses, record and agreement direct the reader towards the Son?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that three witnesses must mean three divine persons?

Action Step

Identify what the Spirit, water and blood are said to do and explain how testimony, rather than counting, should govern your conclusion.

THE JOHANNINE COMMA - WHAT THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE SHOWS

BACK TO CONTENTS

There is an important textual question surrounding the wording of **1 John 5:7**. Because the King James Version contains the words concerning *"the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one,"* we should understand why those words appear in the King James Version and why many later English translations read differently.

This concerns the history of the biblical wording, and it should therefore be examined carefully and without fear. Our confidence in the one true God does not depend upon ignoring manuscript evidence, nor does it depend upon removing a verse from the King James Version.

What Is the Johannine Comma?

The King James Version reads in **1 John 5:7-8**:

> *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

The words in verse 7 concerning *"the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one"* are commonly referred to as the Johannine Comma. There is no question that these words appear in the King James Version. The textual question concerns whether the longer wording belonged to the earliest recoverable Greek wording of John's epistle.

That distinction is important. We are not asking whether the King James Version contains the words because it plainly does. We are asking about the history of those words within the surviving manuscript tradition.

The Early Greek Manuscripts Do Not Contain the Longer Clause

The surviving Greek manuscript evidence is significant. The longer wording concerning the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost is absent from the early Greek manuscripts of 1 John. The clause appears in only a small number of much later Greek witnesses, and in some of those manuscripts the words appear in the margin rather than as part of the original main wording.

The Johannine Comma therefore has weak support within the early Greek manuscript tradition. Its appearance in later Greek witnesses belongs to a much later period in the transmission of the New Testament writings. That historical fact should be acknowledged plainly.

This does not mean that the rest of 1 John is uncertain, nor does it mean that Scripture gives no clear teaching concerning God. It means that this particular clause has a different manuscript history from the surrounding words of the Scripture section. The textual evidence therefore requires us to distinguish between the shorter wording strongly represented in the early Greek manuscript tradition and the longer clause found in only a small number of later Greek witnesses.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does the early Greek manuscript evidence show about the longer clause in **1 John 5:7***?*

Personal Reflection

Has hearing about differences between Greek manuscripts caused confusion or anxiety for you?

Action Step

Compare the manuscript claim with the printed KJV wording and explain what evidence you need to understand before making a claim.

The Longer Wording Has an Earlier History in Latin

The history of the Johannine Comma is different within the Latin tradition. The longer wording became known in parts of Latin-speaking Christianity before it became established within the Greek manuscript tradition.

Over time, the words became familiar in sections of the Latin textual tradition and were eventually included in forms of the Latin Bible. This helps us understand why the clause could become well known in Western Christianity even though its Greek manuscript support was weak.

The history therefore did not move simply from ancient Greek manuscripts directly into the King James Version. The wording had a substantial history within the Latin tradition before becoming established in later printed Greek editions.

That distinction matters because the King James translators worked centuries after the earliest Greek manuscripts were written. By their time, the longer wording had already become part of an established printed textual tradition.

Erasmus and the Printed Greek New Testament

The development of the printed Greek New Testament is important to understanding how the words entered the textual tradition used by the King James translators.

When Erasmus produced his early editions of the Greek New Testament, the Johannine Comma was not included in his first two editions because the Greek manuscripts available to him did not contain the longer wording. The situation later changed when Greek manuscript evidence containing the clause became known to him.

Erasmus then included the longer wording in his third edition of the Greek New Testament, published in 1522. From there, the clause continued within influential later printed Greek editions, and those printed editions contributed to the developing textual tradition commonly associated with the Textus Receptus.

The King James translators worked within that later printed Greek tradition. This explains historically why the Johannine Comma appears in the Authorised Version. The wording did not become part of the King James Version because the translators discovered it throughout the earliest Greek manuscripts. They received it through the printed Greek textual tradition available in their time.

Comparing Young's Literal Translation and the LITV

A comparison of named literal translations must be made accurately. Young's Literal Translation (YLT) and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (LITV) are useful examples of why we must distinguish what a translation actually prints from what the surviving early Greek manuscripts contain. These questions are related, but they are not identical.

In **1 John 5:7**, the LITV prints the following words, including the heavenly witnesses:

> *LITV — "For there are three bearing witness in Heaven: the Father the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."*

The LITV also continues in **1 John 5:8** with the earthly witnesses, *"The Spirit, and the water, and the blood"*. The LITV edition cited here therefore does not omit the heavenly wording.

Young's Literal Translation (YLT) uses the language *"because three are who are testifying"*. It prints the heavenly wording *"in the heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit"* within square brackets that continue into verse 8, and then names the Spirit, the water and the blood as witnesses. Thus the YLT edition cited here marks the disputed wording with brackets; it does not simply delete those words.

The KJV remains the standard for our Scripture quotations. These comparative readings show why claims about particular Bible translations must be checked against the editions themselves. The earlier Greek manuscript evidence must be considered on its own merits, and John's argument concerning the one testimony of Jesus Christ remains the centre of our study.

Why Many Later Translations Read Differently

Many later Bible translations use Greek editions produced through comparison of a much larger body of manuscript evidence, including manuscripts considerably earlier than those available to scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Because the Johannine Comma is absent from the early Greek manuscript tradition, many later translations do not include the longer wording in the main body of the translation. Some place information about it in a footnote or textual note.

This explains why a reader comparing the King James Version with many later translations will notice a considerable difference around **1 John 5:7-8**. The difference should not automatically be interpreted as though one translation is attempting to teach the Trinity while another is attempting to deny it. The principal issue is textual: which wording is best supported by the surviving manuscript evidence.

Recognising that fact allows us to discuss the matter without turning a textual question into an accusation about motives.

This Does Not Mean We Must Abandon the King James Version

Acknowledging the textual history of this particular verse does not require us to abandon the King James Version as our standard English Bible. The King James Version remains the Bible translation used throughout these Study Guides.

We can quote its wording fully and at the same time understand why this particular verse is discussed in textual studies and why other translations differ at this point. There is no need to conceal the historical evidence because truth does not need to fear an honest examination of the manuscript record.

Neither should our doctrine concerning God be built upon one disputed textual clause. The Bible declares the oneness of God repeatedly and clearly throughout Scripture, apart from the textual question surrounding **1 John 5:7**. The one-God foundation therefore does not stand or fall with the Johannine Comma.

Our Doctrine of One God Does Not Depend Upon Removing the Verse

The opposite point is equally important. We do not need to remove the Johannine Comma in order to establish that God is one.

Suppose we retain the King James wording exactly as printed:

“the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

We must still interpret those words according to John's context and according to the rest of Scripture. John does not say that there are three divine persons who together constitute one God. He says *“there are three that bear record in heaven.”*

The subject remains record and testimony. The verse itself therefore still requires interpretation because the presence of the words *“these three are one”* does not tell us, by itself, in what sense the three are one.

John's surrounding argument supplies that context. He speaks of those who *"bear record,"* those who *"bear witness,"* and says that the earthly witnesses *"agree in one."* He then speaks of *"the witness of God"* and tells us that God has *"testified of his Son."*

Whether the longer clause is retained or omitted, John's controlling subject remains testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

The Textual Question and the Doctrinal Question Are Different

We must therefore distinguish two questions. The textual question asks, What wording most likely belonged to the earliest recoverable wording of 1 John? The doctrinal question asks, What does Scripture as a whole teach concerning God?

These questions are related, but they are not identical. If the Johannine Comma was not part of the earliest Greek wording, that fact by itself does not establish our doctrine concerning God. Our understanding of God must arise from the complete testimony of Scripture.

Likewise, retaining the Johannine Comma does not establish that God consists of three distinct divine persons. That conclusion would still have to be demonstrated from what the verses actually says and from the wider testimony of Scripture.

The manuscript question must not carry more doctrinal weight than the evidence supports. Our one-God foundation rests upon direct Scriptural declarations such as *"The LORD our God is one LORD," "there is none other God but one,"* and Paul's statement that there is *"one Spirit."* Those truths do not depend upon the textual history of **1 John 5:7**.

The King James Wording Still Requires Interpretation

Even when the King James wording is accepted exactly as printed, several questions remain. Who is the Father? What does Scripture mean by the Word? Who is the Holy Ghost? What does John mean when he says they *"bear record"*? And in what sense does he say *"these three are one"*?

Those questions cannot be answered simply by pointing to the number three. Scripture has already established that the Father is the eternal Spirit. John himself declares that *"the Word was God,"* and Scripture repeatedly teaches that there is one Spirit.

The expressions must therefore be defined from Scripture rather than placed into a theological formula before John is allowed to explain his own words. Most importantly, John has already identified the controlling subject.

John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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."*

The testimony concerns *"his Son."* That statement remains true regardless of the textual question surrounding verse 7.

What the Manuscript Evidence Shows

We can therefore state the historical position carefully. The longer wording of **1 John 5:7** found in the King James Version has weak support in the early Greek manuscript tradition. It

has a stronger and earlier history within parts of the Latin tradition and became established in the printed Greek tradition at a later stage.

Erasmus did not include the clause in his first two printed Greek editions but included it in his third edition after Greek manuscript evidence containing the wording became available to him. The clause then continued through influential later printed Greek editions and consequently appeared in the King James Version.

That history helps explain why the King James Version contains the longer reading while many later translations do not. But the historical evidence does not settle the doctrine of God by itself.

If the longer clause is omitted, Scripture still declares one God. If the longer clause is retained, John still speaks of those who *"bear record,"* and the surrounding context remains God's witness concerning His Son. Either way, the one-God foundation remains unchanged.

We can therefore examine the manuscript evidence honestly while retaining the King James wording in our study and allowing John himself to determine what those words mean.

Having considered the textual history of the heavenly witnesses, we are now ready to return to John's argument and examine the three earthly witnesses: The Spirit, the water and the blood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can the manuscript evidence be considered honestly while retaining the King James wording for study?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that examining manuscript history means abandoning the KJV?

Action Step

Distinguish the historical question from the doctrinal one and explain how you will discuss the longer reading accurately and respectfully.

THE SPIRIT, THE WATER AND THE BLOOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

John now identifies three witnesses that belong directly to his testimony concerning Jesus Christ. These witnesses must remain within the subject John has already established: the record God has given concerning His Son and the eternal life found in Him.

John wrote in **1 John 5:6**:

> *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."*

The subject is unmistakable: *"Jesus Christ."* John then speaks of the Spirit, the water and the blood as witnesses concerning Him. Their importance lies in the testimony they give concerning Jesus Christ and the salvation found in Him.

The Spirit Bears Witness

John says *"it is the Spirit that beareth witness."* The Spirit testifies concerning Jesus Christ, which agrees directly with the words of Jesus concerning the Spirit of truth.

Jesus said in **John 15:26**:

> *"But 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:"*

Jesus said *"he shall testify of me."* The Spirit therefore does not draw attention away from Jesus Christ. His testimony confirms the truth concerning Him.

John also explains why the Spirit's witness is certain: *"because the Spirit is truth."* The testimony of the Spirit is the true witness of God concerning His Son. It is not uncertain, contradictory or independent of Jesus Christ.

Scripture has also established that there is one Spirit. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, the Spirit who bears witness concerning Jesus Christ is not another divine person standing apart from Him, but the one Spirit of God bearing true testimony concerning the Son.

The Water Points to Cleansing Through the Word

The meaning of the water requires careful examination. John says *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ."* Because the Scripture section eventually leads to the declaration that eternal life is in the Son, we must be careful not to give literal water or water baptism a saving place that Scripture does not give it.

Water baptism does not bring a person into Christ, natural water does not regenerate the soul, and an outward washing does not produce eternal life. The wider testimony of Scripture repeatedly connects spiritual cleansing and the new birth with the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

The water therefore points to the cleansing, life-giving Word of God. It is a spiritual figure of the cleansing accomplished through the Word, not a saving act performed by natural water.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:25-26**:

> *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,"*

Notice the expression *"the washing of water by the word."* The cleansing is connected with the Word.

Jesus expressed the same truth when speaking to His disciples. Jesus said in **John 15:3**:

> *"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."*

Jesus did not say that they were clean through literal water. He said *"clean through the word."* Water therefore provides an appropriate Scriptural figure of cleansing, while the spiritual reality is found in the Word of God.

The original witness concerning the water also directs attention to the Gospel Word proclaimed by Jesus Christ. He preached good tidings and proclaimed deliverance, as

described in **Luke 4:18-19**. Scripture had already connected the sending of God's Word with healing and deliverance.

The psalmist wrote in **Psalm 107:20**:

> *"He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."*

The cleansing, healing Word proclaimed through Jesus Christ reveals the saving work of God. This evidence belongs with the teaching that the water is a figure pointing to the Word, not an outward ceremony that produces the new birth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Spirit's witness and cleansing through the Word point to Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you given literal water a saving power that the Bible assigns to Christ and His Word?

Action Step

Read **1 John 5:6** *with* **Ephesians 5:26**. *Explain what needs changing in the way you understand cleansing and salvation.*

The Word Is Connected With the New Birth

This connection becomes even clearer when Scripture speaks directly about the new birth. James wrote in **James 1:18**:

> *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."*

James says that God *"begat he us with the word of truth."* Peter gives the same teaching.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:23**:

> *"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."*

Peter says plainly that believers are *"born again"* and that this new birth is *"by the word of God."* The new birth is therefore not produced by natural water. The living Word of God is directly connected with the new birth.

This agrees with the teaching of Jesus concerning cleansing through His Word and with Paul's expression *"the washing of water by the word."* Taken together, these Scriptures establish an important Scriptural pattern: water can represent cleansing, the Word performs the spiritual cleansing, the Word is connected with the new birth, and the Spirit gives the inward life of God.

In 1 John 5, the water points to cleansing through the Word of God, whose testimony directs us to the eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

Water Baptism Is a Figure, Not the Saving Reality

Peter gives an especially important statement concerning literal baptism. Peter wrote in **1 Peter 3:21**:

> *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:"*

Peter expressly calls baptism *"the like figure."* He then immediately explains that he is not speaking about physical washing: *"not the putting away of the filth of the flesh."*

Natural water can wash the body, but it cannot cleanse the conscience, regenerate the soul or impart eternal life. The outward baptism was a figure. The saving reality is spiritual.

This agrees with what has already been established concerning the two baptisms. John baptised in water, while Jesus Christ baptises in the Holy Ghost. The outward figure belonged to the order that reached its fulfilment, while the New Covenant reality is found in Jesus Christ and the baptism of the one Spirit.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

It is the one Spirit who brings believers into the one body. Literal water does not place a person into Christ. Therefore, we must not interpret the water of 1 John 5 in a way that gives water baptism a saving place that belongs to the Word, the Spirit and Jesus Christ Himself.

The water is the figure of cleansing. The Word is the spiritual reality by which that cleansing is made known and received.

The Water and the Blood: Cleansing and Redemption

John joins the water and the blood as witnesses concerning Jesus Christ. In this witness, the water signifies cleansing through the living Word of God, while the blood bears witness to His genuine sacrificial death. Both testify to the saving work of the same Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 4:2**:

> *"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:"*

John's confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh confirms the reality of His humanity and His sacrificial death. The blood bears witness to that actual sacrifice, while the water points to cleansing through the living Word of God. They belong together as witnesses concerning the same Jesus Christ.

John does not speak of water alone. He says *"not by water only, but by water and blood."* This is important because the Word of God does not present salvation as cleansing apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The Word declares the truth concerning Him, reveals His saving work and brings the Gospel to the heart. But the foundation of redemption is the genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. John therefore joins water and blood.

The cleansing witness of the Word cannot be separated from the blood of Jesus Christ to which that Word testifies. The Word tells us who Jesus Christ is, declares what He accomplished and calls us to receive the saving truth concerning His death and resurrection.

The water and the blood therefore belong together within one Jesus-centred testimony.

The Blood Points to His Genuine Sacrificial Death

Unlike the figurative use of water, the blood points to something that actually occurred in history. Jesus Christ genuinely shed His blood.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:18-19**:

> *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"*

Peter speaks of *"the precious blood of Christ."* The blood bears witness to the genuine humanity and genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

The eternal Spirit does not possess physical blood. Jesus Christ could shed blood because He truly became man. His humanity was complete and genuine: He possessed a real body, soul, mind, emotions and will, and He truly suffered, shed His blood and died.

The blood therefore bears witness that the saving work of Jesus Christ took place within genuine human history.

John had already emphasised this reality at the beginning of his epistle. John wrote in **1 John 1:1**:

> *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;"*

Jesus Christ was heard, seen, looked upon and handled. His humanity was not an appearance. He genuinely entered human life, and the blood in 1 John 5 bears witness to the real sacrificial death through which redemption was accomplished.

The original Scriptural argument also identifies whose saving blood was shed. The Church is purchased by God's own blood in the man Christ Jesus, who truly suffered and died in flesh. This strengthens both the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ and His identity as the one God revealed in humanity.

Paul wrote in **Acts 20:28**:

> *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."*

The Spirit of God did not cease to be eternal Spirit, but God was revealed in genuine humanity and the blood of that man was shed for our redemption. The blood of Jesus Christ therefore

bears witness to the God who purchased His Church and to the completed sacrifice through which salvation was accomplished.

The Word, the Blood and the Spirit Agree

We can now see how the three witnesses fit together. The water points to cleansing through the living Word of God, the blood points to the genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit bears God's own true witness concerning Jesus Christ and makes the saving reality inwardly known.

These witnesses do not present competing messages. The Word does not proclaim salvation apart from the blood, the blood does not accomplish a salvation unrelated to the truth revealed by the Word, and the Spirit does not give a testimony different from the Word or from the saving work of Jesus Christ.

All three agree. The Word reveals Christ, the blood declares the price of redemption accomplished through His genuine human sacrifice, and the Spirit bears divine witness concerning Him and brings the life of Christ inwardly to the born-again believer.

The entire testimony therefore converges upon Jesus Christ.

The Three Witnesses Agree in One

John wrote in **1 John 5:8**:

> *"And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

John does not say that these witnesses are three divine persons. Water is not a divine person, and blood is not a divine person. The number of witnesses therefore cannot determine the number of divine persons.

John's emphasis is upon their agreement: *"these three agree in one."* The Word represented by cleansing water, the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ and the witness of the Spirit all point in the same direction. They testify concerning the same Jesus Christ, support the same Gospel and lead to the same saving reality.

The Witness Leads to Eternal Life

John then explains where this testimony is leading. John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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."*

The testimony concerns "his Son." John then continued in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

This gives us the final control for interpreting the witnesses. The water does not save, water baptism does not give eternal life, the blood is not an empty religious symbol, and the Spirit is not another divine person acting independently of Jesus Christ.

The witnesses lead to the Son. The cleansing Word testifies concerning Him, the blood bears witness to His genuine sacrificial death, and the Spirit bears God's true witness concerning Him.

John brings everything to the saving declaration *"this life is in his Son."* The witnesses are different, but their testimony is one. They do not lead us to an ordinance or to natural water. They lead us to Jesus Christ.

That prepares us to understand John's next important statement. The earthly witnesses *"agree in one,"* while the King James wording concerning the heavenly record says *"these three are one."*

Those words must now be examined within the controlling subject John has established: one united testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Word, Christ's sacrificial blood and the Spirit give one saving testimony?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated the Spirit, water and blood as three unrelated saving powers?

Action Step

Reflect on the Word, Christ's sacrificial blood and the Spirit's witness. Explain how their united testimony should strengthen your trust in Jesus.

"THESE THREE ARE ONE" - ONE TESTIMONY

BACK TO CONTENTS

The King James Version of **1 John 5:7** contains the familiar words *"these three are one."* These words must be understood within the argument John is making. Throughout the verses, he speaks of witnesses, record, testimony and agreement, and the subject of that testimony is Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 5:7-8**:

> *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

John places the heavenly record and the earthly witnesses beside one another. In both verses, the language is the language of testimony. The important question is therefore not simply how three can be one, but what these witnesses are bearing record concerning.

John answers that question himself.

The Context Is Witness and Testimony

John repeatedly uses expressions connected with testimony. He speaks of *"the Spirit that beareth witness," "three that bear record in heaven," "three that bear witness in earth,"* and *"these three agree in one."*

John then explains the subject of that testimony. John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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 says *"the witness of God"* and then identifies the subject as *"his Son."* This statement governs the whole Scripture section. The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost are connected with the heavenly record, while the Spirit, the water and the blood are connected with the earthly witness, but the testimony itself concerns Jesus Christ.

Therefore, *"these three are one"* must remain within John's controlling subject of witness and record concerning the Son.

Verse 8 Shows How the Language of Oneness Functions

Verse 8 is especially important because John names three earthly witnesses: the Spirit, the water and the blood. He then says *"these three agree in one."*

These witnesses are clearly different. The Spirit is not the water, the water is not the blood, and the blood is not the Spirit. Yet their distinction does not prevent their agreement.

As we have already seen, the water points to the cleansing, life-giving Word of God, the blood bears witness to the genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit bears God's own true witness concerning Jesus Christ. These witnesses do not proclaim different messages. Their testimony is united.

The Word reveals the saving truth concerning Jesus Christ, the blood bears witness to the sacrifice through which redemption was accomplished, and the Spirit confirms that truth and makes the life of Christ an inward reality. Different witnesses can therefore agree in one testimony.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the agreement of the Spirit, water and blood explain oneness of testimony?

Personal Reflection

Have you confused agreement in one testimony with several divine beings combining into one God?

Action Step

Examine the wording of **1 John 5:8**. *State how you will distinguish witnesses from the saving truth they confirm.*

The Word "One" Must Remain Within the Context

The word one cannot be removed from John's argument and made to prove something the surrounding Scripture section does not state. Scripture uses the language of oneness in different ways according to the subject being discussed.

Several things may agree in one purpose, many believers may form one body, a husband and wife may be described as one flesh, and several witnesses may give one testimony. The context determines the nature of the oneness.

In 1 John 5, the immediate context is witness, record, testimony, truth, agreement and God's testimony concerning His Son. That context must determine how we understand *"these three are one."*

We must not begin with a later theological definition and then place that definition into John's words. We must allow John to explain John.

We Do Not Need an Incorrect Greek Argument

Our understanding of this Scripture section must also rest upon sound reasoning. We should not depend upon an argument that assigns different theological meanings to the Greek forms HEIS, MIA and HEN, as though one form necessarily means one individual while another automatically means a unity composed of several.

These are grammatical forms of the same Greek numeral meaning one, changing according to gender. Our interpretation therefore does not depend upon creating doctrinal distinctions between those grammatical forms.

We have something much stronger: John's own context. He repeatedly speaks of witnesses giving record, says that the earthly witnesses *"agree in one,"* identifies the testimony as *"the witness of God,"* and tells us that God has *"testified of his Son."*

The Scripture section itself gives us the controlling meaning.

The Earthly Witnesses Give One Saving Testimony

The earthly witnesses show clearly that the presence of three does not establish three divine persons. Water is not a divine person, and blood is not a divine person, yet John speaks of three witnesses and says that they *"agree in one."*

Their agreement concerns Jesus Christ. The cleansing Word bears witness to Him, the blood bears witness to His genuine human sacrifice, and the Spirit bears divine testimony concerning Him. All three lead to the same saving truth.

The water does not offer salvation apart from Christ, the blood does not testify to another Gospel, and the Spirit does not direct the believer to another divine person. The entire witness converges upon Jesus Christ.

This helps us understand how John uses the language of unity. Different witnesses can be one in the testimony they give.

The Heavenly Record Serves the Same Purpose

The same principle applies to the longer King James wording of verse 7. John says *"there are three that bear record in heaven."* The emphasis must remain upon *"bear record."*

The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost are not introduced in this verses as three divine persons who together compose one God. John presents them as those who bear record, and that heavenly record cannot be separated from the verses surrounding it.

Immediately afterwards John speaks of the earthly witnesses. He then says *"the witness of God is greater"* and explains, *"this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son."* The heavenly record and the earthly witness therefore move towards the same subject: Jesus Christ.

The Father Bears Witness Concerning the Son

Scripture gives us clear examples of the Father bearing witness concerning Jesus Christ.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 3:17**:

> *"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

The testimony from heaven identified Jesus Christ as *"my beloved Son."* The emphasis was not upon defining the internal nature of God. The testimony identified the Son.

Jesus later spoke directly of this witness. Jesus said in **John 5:37**:

> *"And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape."*

Jesus said, *"the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me."* The Father's witness therefore centres upon Jesus Christ. This agrees exactly with John's later statement concerning *"the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son."*

The Spirit Testifies of Jesus Christ

The Holy Ghost also bears witness concerning Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in **John 15:26**:

> *"But 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:"*

Jesus said *"he shall testify of me."* The Spirit's testimony is centred upon Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost does not give another saving message or direct attention away from Jesus Christ.

This agrees with John's words *"the Spirit that beareth witness."* There is one Spirit, and that one Spirit bears God's testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

The Word Reveals the Same Jesus Christ

John also names *"the Word."* The meaning of the Word has already been established in John's own writings.

John wrote in **John 1:1**:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

John does not say that the Word was another God. He says plainly *"the Word was God."*

John then wrote in **John 1:14**:

> *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."*

The Word that was God was made flesh. The revelation of the Word therefore leads directly to Jesus Christ.

The Father bears witness concerning the Son, the Spirit testifies concerning Jesus Christ, and the Word that was God was made flesh. Once again, all of the testimony converges upon the same Jesus Christ.

John Does Not Say Three Persons Are One God

This distinction must remain clear. John does not write, *"There are three divine persons, and these three persons are one God."* He writes *"there are three that bear record in heaven."*

That is John's wording. The activity being described is bearing record, the context is testimony, and the subject of the testimony is the Son. We should therefore not replace John's language with another formula and then claim that John taught that formula.

The words *"these three are one"* stand inside an argument concerning one united testimony.

The Witness of God Is Greater

John brings the whole argument back to its divine authority. John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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."*

The authority of the testimony does not come from the number of witnesses. It comes from God. John says *"the witness of God is greater"* and then tells us exactly what that witness concerns: *"his Son."*

This is the centre of the Scripture section. God Himself has testified concerning Jesus Christ, the earthly witnesses agree with that testimony, the heavenly record supports that testimony, and the believer is called to receive God's record concerning His Son.

The Record Leads to Eternal Life

John then gives the saving conclusion. John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Notice again the words *"this is the record."* John is still speaking the language of testimony, but now he tells us what the record declares: *"this life is in his Son."*

The purpose of the witness is therefore not to lead us to natural water, an outward ordinance or three divine persons. It leads us to Jesus Christ.

The Word declares Him, the blood testifies to His genuine sacrificial death, the Spirit bears divine witness concerning Him, the Father bears witness of the Son, the Word was made flesh, and the Holy Ghost testifies of Him. God's saving record then declares *"this life is in his Son."*

One Testimony Concerning One Christ

We can therefore state John's argument clearly. The witnesses are different, but the testimony is one. The earthly witnesses *"agree in one,"* while the heavenly witnesses *"bear record."*

The witness is God's witness, the record concerns His Son, and the saving truth is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when John says *"these three are one,"* those words belong within the language of united record and testimony.

They do not divide the one God into three distinct divine persons. The witnesses converge upon one saving truth: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and eternal life is in Him.

Having established the unity of the testimony, we can now examine more closely the three expressions named in the King James wording of verse 7: The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must both the heavenly record and earthly witness concern the same Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you focused on the heavenly witnesses while overlooking the earthly witnesses?

Action Step

Read both verses together and explain how their record leads you to the one Christ rather than competing interpretations.

THE FATHER, THE WORD AND THE HOLY GHOST

BACK TO CONTENTS

The King James Version of **1 John 5:7** reads:

> *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."*

We have already examined the textual history of this verse and the meaning of the words *"these three are one."* We can now look more closely at the three expressions John names: the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost.

These expressions must not be given meanings that Scripture itself does not give them. Each must be understood according to the wider biblical testimony, while John's controlling subject remains the same: those who *"bear record"* concerning Jesus Christ.

The Father Is the Eternal Spirit

Scripture plainly identifies God as Spirit.

Jesus said in **John 4:24**:

> *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

God is not one material being among other beings. He is the eternal Spirit. When Scripture speaks of the Father, it is speaking of that one eternal God.

The Father must therefore never be reduced to one divine person forming one part of a larger God. There is one God, and the Father is that eternal Spirit.

Jesus repeatedly spoke of the Father as the One who dwelt within Him. Jesus said in **John 14:10**:

> *"Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."*

Jesus said *"the Father that dwelleth in me."* The Father was not another divine being standing apart from Jesus Christ. The eternal Spirit dwelt within the genuine human life of the Son.

Therefore, when **1 John 5:7** names *"the Father,"* that expression must remain within the one-God revelation already established throughout Scripture. The Father is the one eternal God who bears witness concerning His Son.

The Word Was God

John then names *"the Word."* We do not have to guess what John means because he has already explained the Word in the opening of his Gospel.

John wrote in **John 1:1**:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

The final statement must be allowed to retain its full force: *"the Word was God."* John does not say that the Word was another God, nor does he say that the Word was a second eternal divine person alongside God. He says *"the Word was God."*

The Word therefore belongs to the identity, expression and revelation of the one God. God's Word is not another divine being existing beside Him. The Word is God expressing Himself and making Himself known.

This becomes even clearer when John tells us what happened to that Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Father's witness and John's statement that the Word was God fit within one testimony about Jesus?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed the Father, Word and Holy Ghost must describe three separate Gods?

Action Step

Read **John 1:1** *alongside* **Ephesians 4:4**. *Explain how these truths change your understanding of the testimony concerning Jesus.*

The Word Was Made Flesh

John wrote in **John 1:14**:

> *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."*

The Word that *"was God"* was *"made flesh."* This is central to understanding the relationship between God and Jesus Christ. The one eternal God was revealed through genuine human life.

The Son was not an appearance of humanity. Jesus Christ possessed complete and genuine human life, including body, soul, mind, emotions and will. Through that genuine humanity, the invisible God was made known.

The Word therefore cannot be treated as another divine person who later entered or inhabited a separate human person. John's language is more direct: the Word was God, the Word was made flesh, and the one God was expressed and revealed in the genuine human life of Jesus Christ.

Paul described the same reality in **2 Corinthians 5:19**:

> *"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."*

God was *"in Christ."* The Word therefore belongs directly to God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

John also gives Jesus Christ the title "The Word of God." John wrote in **Revelation 19:13**:

> *"And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God."*

These statements belong together. The Word was God, the Word was made flesh, and Jesus Christ is called *"The Word of God."* The language leads us towards God's revelation in Jesus Christ, not towards another divine person existing beside the Father.

The Holy Ghost Is the One Spirit of God

John's third expression is *"the Holy Ghost."* Again, Scripture gives us a direct controlling statement.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

Paul says plainly *"one Spirit."* Therefore, the Holy Ghost cannot be another divine Spirit existing beside the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ. There is one Spirit.

Paul describes believers as the temple of the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 6:19**:

> *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"*

The Holy Ghost dwells within the believer. Elsewhere, Paul identifies this same indwelling Spirit as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul moves directly from *"the Spirit of God"* to *"the Spirit of Christ."* He does not introduce another Spirit. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and the Holy Ghost is that same one Spirit.

Paul makes the identification still clearer in **2 Corinthians 3:17**:

> *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*

Paul says *"the Lord is that Spirit."* The Holy Ghost is therefore not a third divine person who comes instead of Jesus Christ while the Lord remains absent. The Lord Himself dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit.

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, and there is one Spirit.

The Verse Is Still About Record

Having defined the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost from Scripture, we must return to what John actually says in **1 John 5:7**. He says *"there are three that bear record in heaven."*

The activity being described is bearing record. John is not giving a formal definition of God's internal composition. He is speaking about testimony.

The Father bears record, the Word bears record and the Holy Ghost bears record. The question is therefore: What does that record concern?

John answers immediately in the wider Scripture section. John wrote in **1 John 5:9**:

> *"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."*

The record concerns *"his Son."* The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost must therefore remain within John's larger argument concerning God's testimony about Jesus Christ.

The Scripture section does not move away from Jesus Christ in order to explain three persons within God. It continues to establish the record God has given concerning His Son.

The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost All Point to Jesus Christ

Jesus Himself said that the Father bore witness concerning Him. Jesus said in **John 5:37**:

> *"And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape."*

Jesus said, *"the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me."* The Father's testimony therefore points directly to Jesus Christ.

The Holy Ghost likewise testifies concerning Him. Jesus said in **John 15:26**:

> *"But 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:"*

Jesus said *"he shall testify of me."* The Spirit's testimony is centred upon Jesus Christ.

The Word also leads directly to Jesus Christ because the Word was made flesh and revealed in Him. The Father bears witness concerning the Son, the Holy Ghost testifies concerning Jesus Christ, and the Word was made flesh. All of the testimony converges upon Him.

Father, Word and Holy Ghost Do Not Identify Three Divine Persons

When Scripture itself defines the three expressions, the picture becomes clear. The Father is the one eternal Spirit, the Word was God and was made flesh, and the Holy Ghost is the same one Spirit of God and of Christ.

These expressions therefore do not establish three distinct divine persons within one God. They belong to the revelation, activity and testimony of the one true God.

John's own wording must remain controlling. He does not say that there are three divine persons who together constitute one God. He says *"there are three that bear record in heaven."*

The record is one, the testimony is united, and the subject is Jesus Christ.

One Record Concerning One Christ

The heavenly record and the earthly witnesses therefore belong together. The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost bear record, while the Spirit, the water and the blood bear witness.

As already established, the water points to the cleansing Word of God, the blood bears witness to the genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit bears God's true witness concerning Him. These witnesses do not produce different saving messages. They lead to one record.

John then states the saving content of that record. John wrote in **1 John 5:11-12**:

> *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

John says *"this is the record"* and then declares *"this life is in his Son."* That is the centre of the whole Scripture section.

The Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost do not lead us to three divine persons. They belong to God's united record concerning Jesus Christ. The witnesses agree, the testimony is one, the record concerns one Christ, and the saving conclusion remains *"He that hath the Son hath life."*

With the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost now understood within John's witness context and within the one-God foundation, the body of this Study Guide is complete. We can now bring together the entire argument concerning the words *"these three are one."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Father, Word and Holy Ghost lead to God's record of life in His Son?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated the number of witnesses as more important than God's record of eternal life?

Action Step

Return to **1 John 5:9–12** *and explain how this conclusion should govern your faith and worship.*

CONCLUSION: "THESE THREE ARE ONE" - ONE TESTIMONY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, the controlling subject of 1 John 5 has remained clear. John speaks repeatedly of witness, record, testimony and agreement, and all of that testimony centres upon Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 5:9-12**:

> *"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. 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. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

John tells us exactly what the witness concerns: *"his Son."* He then tells us what the record declares: *"this life is in his Son."* That is the centre of the Scripture section.

The Spirit, the water and the blood bear witness, but they do not lead to different saving truths. The Spirit is the one Spirit of God bearing true testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the water points to the cleansing, life-giving Word of God, and the blood bears witness to the genuine sacrificial death of Jesus Christ through which redemption was accomplished.

Literal water does not save. Water baptism does not impart eternal life or place a person into Christ. The outward washing is a figure, while the spiritual reality is found in the cleansing Word and the work of the one Spirit.

The blood, however, points to an actual historical sacrifice. Jesus Christ genuinely became man, genuinely suffered and genuinely shed His blood. The Word reveals that saving work, and the Spirit bears God's true witness concerning Him.

John therefore says in **1 John 5:8**:

> *"And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."*

Their distinction does not prevent their agreement. The witnesses are different, but the testimony is one.

The King James Version also says in **1 John 5:7**:

> *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."*

The textual history of this longer wording must be acknowledged honestly, but the manuscript question does not change the one-God foundation. If the longer reading is omitted, Scripture still declares one God. If it is retained, John still speaks of those who *"bear record."*

The Father is the eternal Spirit, the Word was God and was made flesh, and the Holy Ghost is the same one Spirit of God and of Christ. These expressions do not establish three distinct divine persons within one God.

The Father bears witness concerning the Son, the Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost testifies concerning Him. The heavenly record therefore converges upon the same Jesus Christ to whom the earthly witnesses point.

Nothing in 1 John 5 overturns the clear Scriptural foundation that God is one and that there is one Spirit. John's purpose is not to provide a formula describing three divine persons. His purpose is to establish the reliability of God's testimony concerning His Son.

The words *"these three are one"* must therefore remain within John's own argument. They belong to the language of united record and testimony. The witnesses are different, but their testimony is one, the record is God's record, and the saving truth is Jesus Christ.

John brings the entire Scripture section to this declaration:

"He that hath the Son hath life."

That is where the testimony leads. The one God has given His witness concerning Jesus Christ, and eternal life is found in Him.

This prepares us for the final Study Guide in this module, where we will bring together the Scriptural revelation established throughout the series: Study Guide 39 - One God Fully Revealed in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the manuscript question and the united witnesses leave John's saving conclusion clear?

Personal Reflection

Which claim about the Johannine Comma or the three witnesses has most affected your understanding?

Action Step

State one correction or conviction reached from the Bible and explain how it directs your confidence to eternal life in Jesus Christ.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Explain the united witness of the Spirit, water, and blood about Jesus Christ. How does John's account lead from that witness to God's gift of eternal life in His Son?

2. Understanding

How does the shorter early Greek reading of **1 John 5:7–8** *relate to the longer King James wording? Explain why the manuscript question must not hide John's main testimony about Christ.*

3. Personal Reflection

Before considering the manuscript evidence, what did you assume the words 'these three are one' proved? Explain what has changed or become clearer in your understanding.

4. Response to Truth

If someone uses one disputed clause to define God, how will you respond fairly? Explain how you will acknowledge the evidence while keeping John's witness about the Son central.

5. Action Step

Which claim about the witnesses of 1 John 5 will you test by reading the surrounding verses, and how will you keep Christ and eternal life at the centre?

6. Early Response

Have you tested that claim against 1 John 5 yet? If so, what changed or was strengthened? If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

What will help you continue to read a disputed verse with its surrounding verses and manuscript evidence? Explain how you will keep the witness about Jesus in view.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why does the agreement of the Spirit, water, and blood not define three divine persons? Explain what they agree about in John's teaching and how the heavenly record concerns Christ.

9. Living the Truth

In a real conversation about **1 John 5:7***, how would you speak honestly about the King James wording and early Greek evidence? Explain the testimony that leads to life in the Son.*

10. Final Response

Bring together the manuscript evidence, the witnesses, God's record about His Son, and the gift of life in Him. What has become clearer to you, and how will you respond to that witness?