

He who has the Son has life.

People of all cultures are used to hearing human testimony in court and assigning great weight to it. How much more impact does the Christian message have since *God is talking!* The Spirit, the water, and the blood guarantee that a bridge has been built to reconnect God and man once again. Jesus Christ is that bridge, and through Word and sacrament ministry, our faith is built and nurtured. We hear the works of God and say "I believe," or in the words of John from our Second Reading today, "*The person who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself,*" (1 John 5:10).

To be sure, whenever we look inward, there is the danger of self-deception. Satan has warped this witness in many people today so that inner feelings and intuition have become their only touchstone of truth (that is, unrelated to Word and sacrament). Some people today evaluate truth and morality by how they feel about it. Objective and universal standards fade away and everything becomes relative: "what is true for me." Some try to find truth about Jesus or messages from Jesus through meditation or prayer. They will say things such as "The Lord told me..." or "The Lord spoke to me last night..." or "I really feel His presence now..." and sometimes what comes out of their mouths next departs from Scripture and thus becomes part of the lie.

But even though the concept of listening to an inner, subjective witness can be abused, it can be used rightly. A healthy faith is always grounded in the objective revelation of God's Word and is guided by the Holy Spirit Himself. As Paul says in Romans 8:16, "*The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children,*" and in Galatians 4:6, "*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'*" The inner comfort we experience as believers comes not from us but from the Spirit, with His words and His truths. It is good when we notice all the inward gifts of being God's children: peace, joy, contentment, hope - they are no accident. God gave them to us to bless us and also to assure us that our faith is real.

There is only one truth - God's truth. God has amply provided an authentic message for all the world, and this message has high-stakes implications - it is all or nothing. Christianity is not one of many philosophies that you can select interesting views and ideas from as though in a cafeteria. John says, "*The person who does not believe God has made Him a liar.*" August Pieper wrote almost a century ago, "God has infinite patience with people who sin against His commandments, but He will not allow His grace to be mocked." God's words are clear enough. Paul wrote in Romans 1:18: "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.*" Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked.

In 1 John 5:11-12, we are given the grand finale, the whole point to human history, God's supreme goal, the very essence of Christianity. John summarises it all in two little statements that even a child could understand: 1. God has given us eternal life, and, 2. He who has the Son has life.

But there is also a grave and awesome threat that hangs over many, many people, giving at the end of verse 12. Read these words carefully: "*The person who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*"

What you make of Jesus Christ will determine the quality of the rest of your life and will determine whether you spend eternity in agony or delight. Christ is not just one of many interesting social philosophers like Confucius, not just another religious revolutionary like Mohammed, not just another great moral teacher like Gandhi. What you make of Him will be your life or your death.

John has written at some length describing how good it is to be in Christ. Consider now what happens if people reject God's gift, reject the gospel, and choose not to believe in the Son. John says simply, "They do not have life." What do you call a body without any life in it? A corpse. If it moves, you call it a zombie, the living dead. The Father did not sacrifice His Son "just for the fun of it." He made that supreme sacrifice, one that tore His fatherly heart out, in order to spare people the torment that Satan is going to suffer. Paul says that we are by nature children of God's wrath. Unless people are reborn in Christ, they stay children of wrath, and unless people are reborn in Christ, they stay that way forever.

Isaiah says in chapter 66 that the flames of hell are never quenched, that the maggots of human decay never die, and that the damned are loathsome to the rest of mankind. Jesus said that what awaits those who reject Him is outer darkness, weeping and grinding of teeth. In Revelation 20:10 John says that hell is like a lake of burning sulfur, where Satan and his helpers will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This is why John writes so earnestly. This is why we need to listen to him. This is why the ministries of your congregation are so important. This is why your family's spiritual well-being is worth your greatest energy. This is a life or death issue for every person on the planet.