

# Authentic Christianity Part 15

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I think every one of us here recognizes that in this world we live in, many times we are subject to misinformation. Allow me to share with you one of the most misinformed statements or beliefs in the world and that is that Christianity is a religion. We're categorized by those in the academic world as one of the major world, if not one of the largest religions in the world but that's really a misinformed statement because as you look at the tenets of Christianity as we will today, it's not a religion, it is a relationship and so today as we pray to begin this time, let us focus that the Lord will show us through his word that it's not about do's and don'ts, it's about him alone. Let's pray and then we'll open the word of God.

*Lord, we confess this morning that really a list of do's and don'ts in our flesh is so much easier to handle. We can check the box off, we can get the eraser on the pencil and feel good at the end of the day but at the same time we recognize that there is a deep seated voidness with religion. So God, I pray today that as we open your word, that you would take tenets of religion, aspects of religion, teachings of religion, and you wouldn't even allow that to enter into the realm of our thought. Lord, today may it only be about a relationship with you. Help us to see it from your perspective and not the world's. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bible to the book of 1 John 5 and if you're a first time guest or visitor with us today, it is at this point in the message where I typically introduce the fact that we're walking through this specific book of the Bible, this time under the idea of authentic Christianity and I would kind of begin to unpack that for a bit and then we would dive into the text and we would begin reading today in verse 6. But this morning, I want to take kind of a step back. If you have your Bibles open with you, whether paper form or electronic form on a phone, an iPad, a tablet, whatever it may be, and I want you to look down at verse 7 of 1 John 5. This is one of those necessary introductions. Your Bible has either one of two readings there, it's what we call the short reading or the long reading. This passage of Scripture, one of the most famous passages in all of the Bible from a textual academic perspective, by some it's called the Johannine comma, others it's called the Johannine gloss. As you look in your Bible, if you have the short reading, verse 7 will say, "And there are three that testify or there are three that bear witness." If you have the long reading, verse 7 of 1 John 5 will say, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."

Now irrespective of the Bible that you have and particularly if you have a study Bible, there will be notes in the margin or below a line at the bottom of the page and more often than not on this verse of the Bible somewhere around it, there will either be a letter or a number with some type of commentary and typically somewhere on the page of a study Bible there is a statement very similar to this that is made, it will say: the most ancient of manuscripts do not contain what I'm calling today the long reading or this long passage. In fact, some of your Bibles that have the long reading will even have a notation that says some of the most ancient manuscripts do not contain this long reading. And the reason I'm going through all this trouble is in just a moment when we begin reading in verse 6, I didn't want everybody looking around saying, "What's happening?" because I'm going to be reading the long version this morning.

So you may be asking, "Well, how did this all come to be? What's happening here?" As you do a study of the text in the manuscripts behind what we have in our hands today, over 25,000 manuscripts have not only been written but discovered by humanity so that we're able to articulate the integrity of the word of God. We take those 25,000 manuscripts and we tend to categorize them into four what we call codexes, collection of Scriptures, what you and I today would call a complete Bible of the ancient days. They are titled Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrian and what is called the Received or the Textus Receptus. The statement that you see in the margin of your Bible at the bottom of your Bible or with a notation in your Bible is absolutely correct. Out of those four families, the three "oldest ones" according to those in the academic field do not contain the long reading. It is only the one that's dated the latest date that does.

Now, before we get overly analytical here, let me remind you of the title of today's message: keep it simple. And so simply put as we address this passage of Scripture, allow me to share with you what was happening in history during these days to hopefully help you understand why there is this discussion about the long or the short reading of verse 7. You may or may not be familiar with the fact that in the early days of the church of Jesus Christ, not only was there martyrdom of the true believers, there was great discussion of theology and there was a group that raised up, their name was the Sabeans. They technically believed in what we call the oneness doctrine. They did not believe in the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. They did not believe in the Trinity. They believed that according to Deuteronomy 6:4 there is only one God but that he is either Father, he is either Son, he is either Holy Spirit but he is not all of those, he is only manifested in one expression at a time and therefore his unity and they were called Sabeans. Well, you could only imagine the first couple of centuries of the church, 1 John 5:7 just fueled the fire. When it says, "these three are one," the Sabeans took this verse and they ran with it and they said, "See, we told you this concept of a trinity isn't biblical."

Well, the Sabeans rose and the Sabeans fell. Then a group came around known as the Arians. The Arians were a group of folks who did not believe that Jesus was eternal with the Father. They believed that Jesus was a second-tiered or a created God and so therefore though they may have believed in what we know as the Trinity, they did not see Jesus and the Holy Spirit as co-equal with the Father and one of the problems was they despised this verse because it said that Jesus is equal with the Father. And so in the first

several hundred years of the church of Jesus Christ, you had two teachings that have long since been proven false that there is no Trinity or that there are second-tiered parts of the Godhead that raised their voice, came to prominence and fell by the wayside. Here's the issue: it took several hundred years because they did not have text messaging back then to communicate like we do today and in 325 AD we finally on paper said Jesus is equal and has always been with the Father, and in 381 we finally said in a place called Constantinople that the Holy Spirit was equal with the other of the Godhead.

The reason I share this with you is those notes that you have in your Bibles saying the most ancient ones don't contain the longer reading, that is textually technically correct however it took us about 400 years to get our act together theologically speaking, and so when I read today "including the long reading," don't panic over what may be in the margin or at the bottom of your Bible. It's a beautiful verse and a Scripture that the early church fathers shared with each other describing not only the power of but the unity of the Godhead.

Beginning in verse 6 of 1 John 5 it says,

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 bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. 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. 10 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. 11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Now the year was 1960 and the branch of the military known as the United States Navy, an individual in the upper ranks coined a phrase that's become very near and dear to many of our hearts in life, the phrase goes a little something like this: keep it simple, stupid. The statement was first utilized because of all of the bureaucratic red tape and all of the issues that were surrounding the day-to-day tasks in those days of a job being performed that he and that branch of the military and ever since there has been kind of this idea of if at all possible, can we just break it down into the most simple form so that everybody and anybody can understand what is intended in the process. That is my desire today, just to "keep it simple," particularly verses 11, 12 and 13, some of the simplest verses in all of the Bible yet some of the most profound theological statements in all of Scripture.

And it begins with a statement, notice what verse 11 says, "And this is the record, that we have eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Now, as you go back into verses 9 and 10 and kind of get the context there, we see that the Lord is giving us a comparison. He's comparing what man says versus what God declares. He is comparing man's perspective versus God's perspective and we see that the wisdom of man is very much different than the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1 says that man's highest level or highest attainment of wisdom is nothing compared to God's lowest. In fact, in Isaiah 55, it says of God, his ways, they're not our ways. His thoughts, they're not our thoughts. His ideas, they're not our ideas. And what we discover is that the way that humanity perceives things is oftentimes very contrary, very different or comparative to how God does.

In this verse it says, "this is the record, eternal life." Forgiveness, salvation, heaven versus hell is found in the person of Jesus Christ. It reminds me of John 18. Remember just hours before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, he's been up all night in an illegal trial that ended up being an illegal verdict and here he finds himself, Jesus Christ, in the presence of a man by the name of Pilate. Pilate, the ruler of his day, the authority of his day, knew because his wife said she had a dream, "This man is innocent." He knew that he should not be crucified. He knew though there was a tradition to deliver one of the criminals to the people and so he thought, "This will be simple. I'll bring before them Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas," a serial killer of the day. You remember who they chose, right? Barabbas. And they declared to Jesus, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Well, in John 18, Pilate takes Jesus aside in his private quarters and begins to ask him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus responds, "What have others told you or do you think this of yourself?" We know later that when Jesus was actually crucified it was Pilate that made sure the phrase "King of the Jews" was put on the cross of Jesus in three distinct languages.

But there in that passage of John 18 when Pilate is questioning Jesus, Jesus makes this statement, he says, "My kingdom is not of here lest my followers, my disciples, they would rise up and fight." Here you have the Ruler of heaven face-to-face with the ruler of earth and there could not have been a greater comparison. One was earthly, one was heavenly. One was all about man, one was all about God. And what we see is in this statement of verse 11 that when we look at forgiveness, when we look at salvation, when we look at the other side, when we contemplate eternity, God sees it from a completely different perspective than man.

But he's very clear about his statement, in fact it says, "And this is the record." Being the son-in-law of an attorney, one of the things that I've heard him say year after year in my life and it's the perspective of an attorney and it's pretty good advice: if it's not written down, it never happened. In other words, it doesn't matter what he said, she said, or they said, what's written down. What does it say here in verse 11, "And this is the record." Three times in the passage we read it says, "It has been recorded. It has been written down." For thousands of years the prophets, the pastors, the seers, the men of God declared that a Messiah would come. They declared in Micah 5 he would be born in Bethlehem and he was. They declared that he would come out of Egypt and he was. They declared in Psalm 22 that he would be pierced for our transgressions and he was. They

declared in Isaiah 53 that by his stripes we would be healed and he was. And so the record then culminates in 1 Corinthians 15 where it says in verse 17, "If Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain." Allow me to give you the New Revised Jeff Version of that passage, "If the tomb is not empty, we can all go home and watch football." Why? Because there's no reason to be here.

That is the basis of our faith and you back up to the first three verses of that chapter and it says that according to the Scriptures, he died. According to the Scriptures, he was buried. According to the Scriptures, he was raised on the third day. According to the Scriptures, he was seen of over 500 people. In other words, it's been made very clear to us who Jesus was going to be, who he was, and that which he lived and did. And so this very simple statement in verse 11 says contrary to what the world says, if you want forgiveness, want salvation, want eternal life, we have a very clear record of who Jesus was going to be, who he is, and who he can be in each and every one of our lives.

But then verse 12, one of the most simplistic verses in all of your Bible, in fact I'll be honest, one of my favorite. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Now, I want you to notice how this compares to all major religious thought. According to verse 12, forgiveness and salvation and eternity are in the hands of an individual who shed his blood and gave his life on our behalf. What does religious thought teach? It teaches that we've got to do something, attain something, or become something in order to be "in the good graces of God." How many world religions teach that you must go on a pilgrimage if you want to win favor with God? How many world religions teach you must go through a certain ritual? You must take a certain class? You must have a certain intellectual understanding? You must go through a certain rite or you cannot have the favor of God in your life? Nowhere in verse 12 does it say that a pilgrimage is required, than an endeavor is required, a class is required, a ritual or rite. It says if you have the Son, you have life and if you don't, you do not.

You know, it reminds me of Matthew 7. Jesus is teaching what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. He's about to draw it to a close and in Matthew 7 he talks about that final great judgment where humanity will stand before him. Now before I share with you the details that happened in Matthew 7, I mentioned earlier about this umbrella of Christianity, that we are one. John 17 made that clear, we are one in Christ, but as an umbrella there are various panels. Some people express their Christianity in little varying ways than others but there are those that I would say are under the "auspice" of Christianity: they claim to be a panel on the umbrella but according to 1 John 5:12, not so fast and that comes up in Matthew 7. Why? Because there's a group of people who stand before God rightfully believing they should be good. I mean, they are standing before God, they are confident, "I've got this. This is good. I'm good to go." But the door is shut. They're not allowed into a place the Bible calls heaven and they're mystified. They don't get it. "How did this happen?" And they begin to have a conversation. This is Jesus recalling this in Matthew 7, it says, "But God, we did great things in your name. We preached great sermons, we cast out devils, we've done all of this, how can we be let out?" To which he makes this profound statement, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you."

How many times do we think, "If I just will do this certain thing, God's going to be pleased with me. Or if I don't do this certain thing. If I take this class, if I go through this ritual, if I recite this statement a certain amount of times, then I'm going to be good." That's not what verse 12 says. In fact, it's very much a comparison or a contrast to what even religious expression says that it's not about what we do, it's whose we are. Notice how clear it is. Very clear. All one syllable words. Maybe I'm a simpleton at heart but I love verse 12. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." It doesn't matter what our educational level is, it doesn't matter what our socioeconomic ladder tells about us, every one of us can understand these very simple one syllable words.

You know, the Apostle Paul though dealt in a world very similar to ours today. It was the church at Corinth. It was an educated city, it was a wealthy city, a group of folks who had a lot of degrees on the wall and a lot of money in the bank and there in 2 Corinthians 11:3 he says, "I am upset. I am frustrated on your behalf because you've departed from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." You know, we as humanity, we tend to make everything as complicated as humanly possible. How many pages, how many words, how many different hoops can we jump through? And the Apostle Paul said, "There are no hoops to jump through, it's just about Jesus." What does it say here in verse 12? There are no hoops. There are no rites. There are no rituals. It's just about Jesus.

A couple of days ago I was discussing this with my children, kind of this subject matter, and one of my children looked at me and he said, "Dad, you've always taught us, it's not what you know, it's who you know." You say, "Well, how did your kids learn it?" They learned it from my dad, their grandfather. You see, when I was 18 years old and my parents took me to college, they moved me into the dorm room and got me all settled. This may be shocking to some of you, but my dad doesn't say a whole lot of anything. He's not very verbal. In fact, I've been accused of taking all my dad's words. He doesn't have time to talk when he's around me so if you ever had the privilege of meeting him over the years, if he just smiles and nods his head, that's like three paragraphs to him, okay? That's who he is. So we'd gone the whole day moving into the dorm room and my mom, I guess very concerned that we hadn't talked a whole lot, looked at my dad and said, "Are you going to say anything to Jeff before we leave?" To which he looked at me and I'll never forget these words, he said, "Son, it's not the grades you make, it's the hands you shake." I thought, "Then why am I at college?" I mean, seriously. If it's not about the grades.... But over time what I realized was a very profound statement: it's not about what or what not is or is not attained, life is about who we know. And it's not just on this side, it's on the other side as well.

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." So simplistic that many people often miss it but here's the greatness of this passage in verse 13, it says not only is there this statement and this simplicity, there is security. "These things are written that you may know that you have eternal life if you believe in the name of the Son of God." Not that you may think, not that you might hope, not that you might wish for or if you're luck, it says that we can know this for a fact.

You know, the comparison that we need to address today is this is so contrary to the way that most people think, not just about life but even about the person of Jesus in the message of Christianity. If you'll allow me just for illustrative purposes, I want you to imagine today, just imagine that from the ceiling to the platform there is an invisible line. I just want to divide the platform into this side and into the other side. I want you to imagine that this side is lost, this side is spiritual blind. Not you, the platform. Don't worry. I'm not talking about y'all, okay? We're up here. This side of the platform represents spiritual lostness. This side of the platform represents spiritual foundness or salvation or forgiveness. The question we have to ask ourselves is: what does it take to cross the line? I'm lost. I need forgiveness. I desire salvation. What has to happen in my life to go across the line because it necessarily makes sense that whatever it is I declare takes me across the line, if somehow that is undone or made void, it can bring me back.

Notice what it says there in verse 13, "we may know." We can be certain. We can be secure that if we're on this side of the line, we're good for all of eternity. Why is that such a comparison? Let me share with you: if you believe that by doing some type of religious act, rite or ritual that that gets you across the line, that's what does it, you doing something, then if you forget to do it, you did it wrong or somehow find a way to undo it, it brings you back. If somebody else can do something on your behalf to bring you across the line, then it just makes sense that they could somehow bring you back. But if according to verse 13 our crossing the line has nothing to do with religion and nothing to do with what you do or don't do but has everything to do with Jesus, then he that has the Son has life, he that hath not the Son hath not life. In other words, verse 13 compares what Jesus as a relationship does that religion can never attain. Why? Because we falter. We mess up and we fail. And if that's what we're trusting to get us across, then somehow, someway, we're going to fail at some point, but if it's only the sacrifice of Jesus that we're trusting in, then we can know that we're saved. We can know that we're forgiven. We can know that we have eternal life.

And I think the clarity that we have here in verse 13 that we may know, reminds me of what Jesus taught us in John 12. He said that those who were his children, those that were a part of his flock, that no man, that no person, there was no thing that can remove them from his hand. You know, I believe that many of us at some point in our lives have had a misinformed picture of what salvation is. Allow me to share with you unfortunately how a lot of people picture salvation, that at some point in their lives, God dropped the rope of grace out of heaven, forgiveness and salvation, and they wanted it, they desired it, they knew they needed it and so the picture we have is that we jump up, we grab a hold of the rope and we hang on for dear life. Now, some of you are of age to remember back when in gym class they used to make young people climb the rope in gym and if you've ever tried to hold onto a rope whether that's a ski rope in the water or any type of rope device, you know that it doesn't take long for fatigue to settle in, for your muscles to begin to twitch, for sweat to begin to be profuse, and pretty soon it doesn't matter how well intended, it doesn't matter how much you desire to hold on, eventually things happen to cause you to slip.

If that's our picture of salvation and we're holding onto the rope of forgiveness, guess what happens? Temptations come and we mess up. Trials arise and we're distracted. Things occur in our life that cause us somehow, somehow to eventually slip and hit the bottom and we look up to the heavens and we say, "What happened? What went wrong?" And we question the security. We question when it says in verse that you can know these things. I don't think that's an accurate picture of grace. I don't think that's an accurate picture of forgiveness and salvation. I don't think that it is a rope dangling from heaven.

Allow me to use another illustration. It may sound like somewhat trite but just work with me: it's a ladle. You say, "A ladle?" Yes, the instrument that you use for soup or for what other item. In other words, rather than something to be held onto, it is something for the holding thereof. When Jesus made the statement in John 12 that no thing or no one can take us out of his hand, let me give you the picture he was giving: that when we were sinking in sin, when we were rebellious to him, when we were breaking the commandments, when we were vile against the things of God, he knew we couldn't hold onto a rope. He knew that we would eventually slip. He had seen humanity for thousands of years try religion and it never worked and so he said rather than holding onto something that you can't hold onto, how about I just reach down and I'm going to scoop you up and I'm going to hold you in my hands. There was nothing you could have done to earn it, to deserve it or to attain it but what was said in verse 12 is true: if we have the Son we have life, if we don't we don't and we can know this. You know, maybe here today in most of your life if not all of your life you thought this whole person of Jesus Christianity was some type of religious expression that you had to kind of climb up to heaven with, allow the word of God to share with you different today. It's not a rope to hold onto, it is hands to be held by.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed as we prepare for our time of invitation. Maybe you're that individual today, maybe you're that person like we spoke of earlier in the service like the middle school students that made those decisions this week, and maybe you're that person today who realized for the first time that it's not about religion, it's about relationship. If you're in that position today and you want the tide in your life to be turned, I've got great news for you: that can change today. You don't have to jump through some hoops. You don't have to check off any boxes, cross t's or dot i's, you just need to have a real serious conversation with God. Maybe your conversation would sound a little something like this. You don't need to say it out loud, you don't even need to say the same words I would say but maybe this is how your prayer or your conversation would go. "God, today I realize that I've been trying to attain your favor by doing the right things or not doing the wrong things and I realize that's not going to get me anywhere. I've come to the understanding today it's not about religion, it's about relationship and so today I want to recognize that I'm the problem and Jesus is the answer and he's the only one who can offer forgiveness of my sins. He's the only one who can save me because he's the one who went to the cross and he's the one who shed his blood, he's the one that rose from the dead and I know that it is he and he alone who can give me the grace and the forgiveness I desire. So Lord, I come honestly this morning. I don't know all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the only

answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a moment we're going to have a time of invitation. I'm going to pray over us. We're going to stand. Our worship team is going to lead us and you have the opportunity just to step out and to step forward and declare today so we can celebrate with you that Jesus is your Savior. If that's where you are today, we would encourage you to step out and step forward or maybe that's happened in your life years ago, in fact, let me share with you before I pray that during the first service I had somebody send me an email saying, "I've been saved. I need to be baptized. Who do I talk to?" Come talk to us this morning. We'd love to show you all the things that need to take place. Or maybe today, you've been saved, you've been baptized and you're ready to put the spiritual stake in the sand and say, "I'm ready to be a part of First Baptist Opeilika," or any other decision, whatever they may be, we want you to know this is not a time of condemnation, this is a time of celebration.

*Lord, today how good it is to know that all you desire is to celebrate a transformed life. All you want for us is to come to our senses and come home to you. All you desire is for us to quit trying and start believing and trusting. So God, whatever that looks like in our life today, Lord, I just pray that you would help us at this time express it as we need to. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.