**The Witness of the Spirit**

*1 John 5:6*

**Introduction**

1. We crave confidence of salvation, and God grants us confidence of salvation.
2. However, in the denominational world, the doctrines taught concerning confidence of salvation are highly subjective, and contradictory to the teaching to of the New Testament.
3. Part of the confidence God offers is in the witness provided by the Holy Spirit – **1 John 5:6, 10; Romans 8:16**
4. These scriptures offer wonderful encouragement to the disciples of the Lord concerning assurance of salvation, but like any scripture they must be understood lest they are twisted to our own destruction (**cf. 2 Peter 3:16**).
5. Denominational idea:
   1. “The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God” (Wesley, John, The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse One, II. 4, 5, 6)
   2. “the way we know Christianity to be true is by the self-authenticating witness of God’s Holy Spirit.” (Craig, William Lane. Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (p. 43). Crossway. Kindle Edition.)
6. Does this properly represent what the scriptures teach about the witness of the Spirit? What are the problems with this view? What is the witness of the Spirit?
7. Is there an inner, self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit?
8. A Claim of Subjective Experience
   1. “the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable…for him who has it; that such a person does not need supplementary arguments or evidence in order to know and to know with confidence that he is in fact experiencing the Spirit of God.” (Craig, William Lane. Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (p. 43). Crossway. Kindle Edition.)
      1. “such an experience provides one not only with a subjective assurance of Christianity’s truth, but with objective knowledge of that truth; and that arguments and evidence incompatible with that truth are overwhelmed by the experience of the Holy Spirit for him who attends fully to it.” (ibid.)
      2. I.e. the one who knows he has had the experience of the inner working of the Holy Spirit need not question his experience, and what “truths” he knows about Christianity in conjunction with that experience are verified by the experience regardless of evidence to the contrary.
   2. “It seems to me that the New Testament teaches such a view with respect to both the believer and the unbeliever alike. Now at first blush it might seem self-defeating or perhaps circular for me to appeal to scriptural proof texts concerning the witness of the Spirit, as if to say that we believe in the Spirit’s witness because the Scripture says there is such a witness. But insofar as ours is an ‘in-house’ discussion among Christians, it is entirely appropriate to lay out what Scripture teaches on religious epistemology.” (ibid)
      1. I.e. there is no need for proof of the inner witness of the Spirit from the Holy Scriptures, though the Scriptures do speak of it.
      2. How else would he have ever considered the idea in such terms if it weren’t for reading about it in scripture, or hearing someone who has done so explain it to him?
   3. **Luke 13:24-27** – indicative of the possibility to suppose that you know the Lord through a subjective experience, but do not in fact know Him.
      1. **Contradictory answer to this** – “the Scriptures lay down those clear, obvious marks, as preceding, accompanying, and following that gift [of the inner witness of the Spirit]…For instance: The Scripture describes repentance, or conviction of sin… Again, the Scriptures describe the being born of God, which must precede the witness that we are his children… But waving the consideration of whatever he has or has not experienced in time past, by the present marks may we easily distinguish a child of God from a presumptuous self-deceiver.” (Wesley, John, The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse One, II. 4, 5, 6) (https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-10-the-witness-of-the-spirit-discourse-one/)
         1. *NOTE: W.L. Craig aligns himself with the “Wesleyan Tradition”*
      2. **Which is it?** – “such a person does not need supplementary arguments or evidence in order to know” or “the Scriptures lay down those clear, obvious marks, as preceding, accompanying, and following that gift [of the inner witness of the Spirit]”
9. A Suggestion that the Subjective Experience is “Veridical and Unmistakable” (hence, self-authenticating)
   1. “Sometimes this is called ‘assurance of salvation’ by Christians today; and assurance of salvation entails certain truths of Christianity, such as ‘God forgives my sin,’ ‘Christ has reconciled me to God,’ and so on, so that in having assurance of salvation one has assurance of these truths.” (Craig, William Lane. Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (p. 44). Crossway. Kindle Edition.)
      1. I.e. intrinsic to salvation is forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. so when you have the “assurance of salvation” by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit you know without question that these essentials are true for you personally – that you have been forgiven and reconciled to God.
      2. In other words, I know I am forgiven and reconciled because I know I am saved.
      3. **What it should be – I KNOW I AM SAVED BECAUSE I AM FORGIVEN AND RECONCILED ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURES CONDITIONS.**
   2. **Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 17:7-10** – going on our own mind/experience simply is dangerous. Trust in the Lord (objective, outside myself) is dependable in contrast to my deceitful heart (subjective, inside myself).
      1. **Book of Mormon** – ““And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:4–5).
         1. “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.” (Doctrine and Covenants 9:8)
      2. **Suggested difference** – “I think that [this deep-seated fundamental assurance] is borne by the witness of the Holy Spirit to you. Now certainly Mormons will speak of something similar – a burning in the bosom when the Book of Mormon is read – but I would say that whereas we do not have defeaters for the witness of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament sense, we have overwhelming defeaters for the truth of Mormon belief…I think that there's just no chance that Mormonism could be true… And so in the case of Mormonism, and I would say Islam as well, there are very powerful defeaters, but I don't think there are in the case of the witness of the Holy Spirit.” (Craig, W.L., Burning in the Bosom vs Assurance of Salvation, reasonablefaith.org)
      3. **Contradictory** – “a person does not need supplementary arguments or evidence in order to know and to know with confidence that he is in fact experiencing the Spirit of God,” but the Mormons who claim the same experience do?
         1. What makes the appeal to objective evidence for verifying the subjective experience necessary for them but not you?
         2. The answer lies within the acceptance of an ecumenical approach to “Christianity” – denominational unity in diversity. 🡪
10. A True Testimony Despite Doctrinal Differences with Others Claiming the Same Experience
    1. “Now the truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us is not, I’m convinced, the subtleties of Christian doctrine. There are too many Spirit-filled Christians who differ doctrinally for that to be the case. What John is talking about is the inner assurance the Holy Spirit gives of the basic truths of the Christian faith…the great truths of the gospel. This assurance does not come from human arguments but directly from the Holy Spirit himself.” (Craig, William Lane. Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (pp. 44-45). Crossway. Kindle Edition.)
       1. “in certain contexts the experience of the Holy Spirit will imply the apprehension of certain truths of the Christian religion, such as ‘God exists,’ ‘I am condemned by God,’ ‘I am reconciled to God,’ ‘Christ lives in me,’ and so forth;” (ibid. p. 43)
       2. I.e. if what is known, believed, and accepted are the “great truths of the gospel,” then it is certain that the inner testimony is in fact by the Holy Spirit.
          1. Sometimes the “great truths of the gospel” are explained by this passage – **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**
       3. This, despite what doctrinal differences may exist.
    2. **1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 John 9-11** – requires unity in mind and judgement.
    3. **2 Timothy 2:15-19** – the Bible teaches that one who is ***“approved to God”*** and belongs to Him will rightly divide truth and shun error of all sorts.
    4. **Conclusion: If two claim knowledge of fellowship with God by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit who believe and practice contradictory doctrines one or both must be wrong, but they can’t both be true.**
       1. **2 Corinthians 1:18-20** – God says “Yes,” He does not “Yes and No.”
11. By what means and method does the Holy Spirit operate?
12. The Bible teaches that the Person of the Holy Spirit operates in man’s salvation by the instrument of the revealed word of God – **Ephesians 6:17**
13. What the Word Does the Spirit Does
    1. **Though they are distinguished from one another as a carpenter is from his tools, they are inseparable from each other in saving activity.**
    2. *Gives life* – **2 Corinthians 3:6** (Spirit), **James 1:18** (Word)
    3. *Born of* – **John 3:5** (Spirit), **1 Peter 1:23** (Word)
    4. *Salvation* – **Titus 3:5** (Spirit), **James 1:21** (Word)
    5. *Sanctification* – **2 Thessalonians 2:13** (Spirit), **John 17:17** (Word)
    6. *Indwelling* – **Romans 8:11** (Spirit), **Colossians 3:16** (Word)
    7. *Truth* – **John 16:13** (Spirit), **John 17:17** (Word)
14. What is the witness of the Spirit?
15. What is a witness?
    1. **Witness** – “(noun) (1) a person who sees an event; (2) evidence; proof” “(verb) (2) have knowledge of (an event or change) from personal observation or experience; (2b) give or serve as evidence of; testify to” (New Oxford American Dictionary)
    2. *martyreō* (V) – “to confirm or attest someth. on the basis of personal knowledge or belief, bear witness, be a witness.” (BDAG)
       1. ***“the Spirit…bears witness” (1 John 5:6).***
    3. *martyria* (N) – “confirmation or attestation on the basis of personal knowledge or belief, testimony” (BDAG); “evidence given” (STRONG)
       1. ***“the witness of God is greater” (1 John 5:9).***
    4. **A witness is person who possesses reliable/true evidence, and relays that evidence through testimony.**
16. The Spirit’s Witness is the Revealed Word of God
    1. John record’s Jesus’ promise of sending the Spirit to testify of the truth through the apostles – **John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:12-13**
    2. ***“He will guide you into all truth”*** – **Jude 3** – delivered through apostles and prophets until completed.
    3. The apostles’ doctrine (inspired by the Spirit) reveals the truth about Christ and His will – **Acts 2:42; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 1 John 4:6**
17. ***“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16)***
    1. It is important to notice the preposition, ***“with.”***
       1. “To our minds. This pertains to the adoption; and it means that the Holy Spirit furnishes evidence to our minds that we are adopted into the family of God.” (Albert Barnes)
       2. Changing “with” into “to” would fit the position that the witness of the Spirit is a subjective experience which is “veridical and unmistakable” regardless of any “arguments and evidence incompatible with that truth.”
       3. **However, “with” indicates that “our spirit” is not merely the recipient of testimony that we are children but is one of the witnesses testifying to that fact.**
          1. **Therefore, if “our spirit” “bears witness” to facts contrary to that which the “spirit Himself bears witness” then we know we are NOT children of God.**
    2. **How is the Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God?**
       1. **(vv. 1-2)** – through the ***“law of the Spirit of life”***
       2. Whatever this ***“law of the Spirit of life”*** is, it frees us from ***“the law of sin and death”*** – it saves us.
       3. **Romans 1:16** – it is the gospel of Christ, i.e. the revealed message/word.
    3. **How is our spirit bearing witness that we are children of God?**
       1. **(vv. 1, 5-8)** – walk according to the Spirit (His revelation).
       2. **(vv. 12-15)** – by the Spirit’s revelation we put to death deeds of the body and walk according to the Spirit’s revelation as obedient children.
    4. **(v. 16)** – the Holy Spirit testifies to what one does to be a child of God, and our spirit testifies that we have done those things through our submission.
       1. These two combine as witnesses to verify that we are indeed children of God.
       2. **It is not “self-authenticating,” but must be authenticated with the word of God that the Spirit has revealed – 2 Corinthians 13:5**
    5. When we obey the Spirit’s revealed commands of Christ, we can know that we are the saved children of God – **1 John 2:3-6**

**Conclusion**

1. We can have confidence in our salvation, in our fellowship with God, and one of the ways God gives us this confidence is through the witness of the Holy Spirit.
2. This is not a subjective feeling or experience that is unmistakable and unchallengeable, but involves the gospel message being revealed to us, and our obedience of faith in response to it.
3. We have the witness of the Spirit that we are children of God, thus confidence of the hope of salvation, when we have done what the Spirit has revealed we must do to be in a right relationship with God.