

1 John 5:7

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon on 1 John 5:7 explores the doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizing the unity and divinity of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost as essential to Christian faith.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, Matthew 3:17, Matthew 28:19, John 1:1, John 10:30, John 14:26, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Colossians 2:9, Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "The Trinity", "The Divinity of Christ"

Description

John Gill expounds on 1 John 5:7, emphasizing the significance of the heavenly witnesses--the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost--who testify to the divinity and sonship of Jesus Christ. He addresses the textual controversies surrounding this verse, defending its authenticity against claims of omission in various manuscripts and translations. Gill highlights the unity of these three witnesses, asserting their distinct personalities and shared essence as one God, which affirms the doctrine of the Trinity. He also references ancient Jewish beliefs that align with this understanding, illustrating the historical context of the Trinity in both Christian and Jewish thought. Ultimately, Gill's sermon reinforces the foundational Christian belief in the triune nature of God.

Transcript

Ver. 7. For there are three that bear record in heaven,.... That is, that Jesus is the Son of God. The genuineness of this text has been called in question by some, because it is wanting in the Syriac version, as it also is in the Arabic and Ethiopic versions; and because the old Latin interpreter has it not; and it is not to be found in many Greek manuscripts; nor cited by many of the ancient fathers, even by such who wrote against the Arians, when it might have been of great service to them: to all which it may be replied, that as to the Syriac version, which is the most ancient, and of the greatest consequence, it is but a version, and a defective one.

The history of the adulterous woman in the eighth of John, the second epistle of Peter, the second and third epistles of John, the epistle of Jude, and the book of the Revelations, were formerly wanting in it, till restored from Bishop Usher's copy by De Dieu and Dr. Pocock, and who also, from an eastern copy, has supplied this version with this text. As to the old Latin interpreter, it is certain it is to be seen in many Latin manuscripts of an early date, and stands in the Vulgate Latin edition of the London Polyglot Bible: and the Latin translation, which bears the name of Jerom, has it, and who, in an epistle of his to Eustochium, prefixed to his translation of these canonical epistles, complains of the omission of it by unfaithful

interpreters.

And as to its being wanting in some Greek manuscripts, as the Alexandrian, and others, it need only be said, that it is to be found in many others; it is in an old British copy, and in the Complutensian edition, the compilers of which made use of various copies; and out of sixteen ancient copies of Robert Stephens's, nine of them had it: and as to its not being cited by some of the ancient fathers, this can be no sufficient proof of the spuriousness of it, since it might be in the original copy, though not in the copies used by them, through the carelessness or unfaithfulness of transcribers; or it might be in their copies, and yet not cited by them, they having Scriptures enough without it, to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, and the divinity of Christ: and yet, after all, certain it is, that it is cited by many of them; by Fulgentius {z}, in the beginning of the "sixth" century, against the Arians, without any scruple or hesitation; and Jerom, as before observed, has it in his translation made in the latter end of the "fourth" century; and it is cited by Athanasius {a} about the year 350; and before him by Cyprian {b}, in the middle, of the "third" century, about the year 250; and is referred to by Tertullian {c} about, the year 200; and which was within a "hundred" years, or little more, of the writing of the epistle; which may be enough to satisfy anyone of the genuineness of this passage; and besides, there never was any dispute about it till Erasmus left it out in the, first edition of his translation of the New Testament; and yet he himself, upon the credit of the old British copy before mentioned, put it into another edition of his translation. The heavenly witnesses of Christ's sonship are,

the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. The "Father" is the first Person, so called, not in, reference to the creatures, angels, or men, he is the Creator, and so the Father of; for this is common to the other two Persons; but in reference to his Son Jesus Christ, of whose sonship he bore witness at his baptism and transfiguration upon the mount. The "Word" is the second Person, who said and it was done; who spoke all things out of nothing in the first creation; who was in the beginning with God the Father, and was God, and by whom all things were created; he declared himself to be the Son of God, and proved himself to be so by his works and miracles; see

Mr 14:61, &c. and his witness of himself was good and valid; see Joh 8:13; and because it is his sonship that is, here testified of, therefore the phrase, "the Word", and not "the Son", is here used. "The Holy Ghost" is the third Person, who proceeds from the Father, and is also called the Spirit of the Son, who testified of, Christ's sonship also at his baptism, by descending on him as a dove, which was the signal given to John the Baptist, by which he knew him, and bare record of him, that he was the Son of God. Now the number of these witnesses was three, there being so many persons in the Godhead; and such a number being sufficient, according to law, for the establishing of any point: to which may be added, that they were witnesses in heaven, not to the heavenly inhabitants, but to men on earth; they were so called, because they were in heaven, and from thence gave out their testimony; and which shows the firmness and excellency of it, it being not from earth, but from heaven, and not human, but divine; to which may be applied the words of Job, in Job 16:19; it follows,

and these three are one; which is to be understood, not only of their unity and agreement in their testimony, they testifying of the same thing, the sonship of Christ; but of their unity in essence or nature, they being the one God. So that, this passage holds forth and asserts the unity of God, a trinity of persons in the Godhead, the proper deity of each person, and their distinct personality, the unity of essence in that they are one; a trinity of persons in that they are three, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and are neither more nor fewer; the deity of each person, for otherwise their testimony would not be the testimony of God, as in 1Jo 5:9; and their distinct personality; for were they not three distinct persons, they could not

be three testifiers, or three that bare record. This being a proper place, I shall insert the faith of the ancient Jews concerning the doctrine of the Trinity; and the rather, as it agrees with the apostle's doctrine in words and language, as well as in matter. They call the three Persons in the Godhead three degrees: they say {d},

"Jehovah, Elohenu (our God), Jehovah, De 6:4; these are the three degrees with respect to this sublime mystery, in the beginning Elohim, or God, created, Ge 1:1, &c."

And these three, they say, though they are distinct, yet are one, as appears by what follows {e}:

"come see the mystery of the word; there are three degrees, and every degree is by itself, yet they are all one, and are bound together in one, and one is not separated from the other."

Again, it is said {f},

"this is the unity of Jehovah the first, Elohenu, Jehovah, lo, all of them are one, and therefore: called one; lo, the three names are as if they were one, and therefore are called one, and they are one; but by the revelation of the Holy Spirit it is made known, and they by the sight of the eye may be known, dxa Nyla atld, "that these three are one": and this is the mystery of the voice which is heard; the voice is one, and there are three things, fire, and Spirit, and water, and all of them are one in the mystery of the voice, and they are but one: so here, Jehovah, Elohenu, Jehovah, they are one, the three, Nynwng, forms, modes, or things, which are one."

Once more {g},

"there are two, and one is joined unto them, and they are three; and when the three are one, he says to them, these are the two names which Israel heard, Jehovah, Jehovah, and Elohenu is joined unto them, and it is the seal of the ring of truth; and when they are joined as one, they are one in one unity."

And this they illustrate by the three names of the soul of man {h};

"the three powers are all of them one, the soul, spirit, and breath, they are joined as one, and they are one; and all is according to the mode of the sublime mystery,"

meaning the Trinity.

"Says R. Isaac {i} worthy are the righteous in this world, and in the world to come, for lo, the whole of them is holy, their body is holy, their soul is holy, their Spirit is holy, their breath is holy, holy are these three degrees "according to the form above".--Come see these three degrees cleave together as one, the soul, Spirit, and breath."

The three first Sephirot, or numbers, in the Cabalistic tree, intend the three divine Persons; the first is called the chief crown, and first glory, which essence no creature can comprehend {k}, and designs the Father, Joh 1:18; the second is called wisdom, and the intelligence illuminating, the crown of the creation, the brightness of equal unity, who is exalted above every head; and he is called, by the Cabalists, the second glory {l}; see 1Co 1:24 Heb 1:3. This is the Son of God: the third is called understanding sanctifying, and is the foundation of ancient wisdom, which is called the worker of faith; and he is the parent of faith, and from his power faith flows {m}; and this is the Holy Spirit; see 1Pe 1:2. Now they say {n} that these three first numbers are intellectual, and are not twdm, "properties", or "attributes", as the

other seven are. R. Simeon ben Jochai says {o},

"of the three superior numbers it is said, Ps 62:11, "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this"; one and two, lo the superior numbers of whom it is said, one, one, one, three ones, and this is the mystery of Ps 62:11."

Says R. Judah Levi {p},

"behold the mystery of the numberer, the number, and the numbered; in the bosom of God it is one thing, in the bosom of man three; because he weighs with his understanding, and speaks with his mouth, and writes with his hand."

It was usual with the ancient Jews to introduce Jehovah speaking, or doing anything, in this form, I and my house of judgment; and it is a rule with them, that wherever it is said, "and Jehovah", he and his house or judgment are intended {q}; and Jarchi frequently makes use of this phrase to explain texts where a plurality in the Godhead is intended, as Ge 1:26; and it is to be observed, that a house of judgment, or a sanhedrim, among the Jews, never consisted of less than three. They also had used to write the word "Jehovah" with three "Jods", in the form of a triangle,

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as representing the three divine Persons: one of their more modern {r} writers has this observation on the blessing of the priest in Nu 6:24:

"these three verses begin with a "Jod", in reference to the three "Jods" which we write in the room of the name, (i.e. Jehovah,) for they have respect to the three superior things."

{z} Respons. contr. Arian. obj. 10. & de Trinitate, c. 4. {a} Contr. Arium, p. 109. {b} De Unitate Eccles. p. 255. & in Ep. 73. ad Jubajan, p. 184. {c} Contr. Praxeam, c. 25. {d} Zohar in Gen. fol. 1. 3. {e} Ib. in Lev. fol. 27. 2. {f} Ib. in Exod. fol. 18. 3, 4. {g} Ib. in Numb. fol. 67. 3. {h} Ib. in Exod. fol. 73. 4. {i} Ib. in Lev. fol. 29. 2. {k} Sepher Jetzira, Semit. 1. {l} Sepher Jetzira, Semit. 2. {m} Ib. Semit. 3. {n} R. Menachem apud Rittangel. in Jetzira, p. 193. {o} Tikkune Zohar apud ib. p. 64. {p} Apud ib. p. 38. {q} Zohar in Gen. fol. 48. 4. Jarchi in Gen. xix. 24. Vid. T. Bab. Beracot, fol. 6. 1. & Gloss. in ib. & Sanhedrin, fol. 3. 2. {r} R. Abraham Seba in Tzeror Hammor, fol. 113. 2.

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