

1John 5:7-8, Is it an interpolation?

It reads in the King James Version, also known as the Authorized Version:

“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.” -1John 5:7-8

The words in bold italics are simply not a part of the generally accepted New Testament manuscripts. Regrettably, in this particular passage some other versions read essentially the same.

Most Bible commentaries that mention this addition tell us that it is a spurious comment added to the biblical text.

Consider the words of *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: “Notice that AV [the Authorized Version] includes additional material at this point. But the words are clearly a gloss [an added note] and are rightly excluded by RSV [the Revised Standard Version] even from its margins” (1970, p. 1269).

In the New Revised Standard Version, 1 John 5:7-8 correctly and more concisely reads,

“There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.”

John personifies the three elements here as providing testimony, just as Solomon personified wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

Many other more recent Bible versions likewise recognize the spurious added text and omit it, including:

New International Version,
American Standard Version
New American Standard Bible
English Standard Version
New English Bible
Revised English Bible
New American Bible

Jerusalem Bible
New Jerusalem Bible
Good News Bible
New Living Translation
Holman Christian Standard Bible
Bible in Basic English
Twentieth Century New Testament.

“The textual evidence is against 1 John 5:7,” explains Dr. Neil Lightfoot, a New Testament professor. “Of all the Greek manuscripts, only two contain it. These two manuscripts are of

very late dates, one from the fourteenth or fifteenth century and the other from the sixteenth century. Two other manuscripts have this verse written in the margin. All four manuscripts show that this verse was apparently translated from a late form of the Latin Vulgate" (*How We Got the Bible*, 2003, pp. 100-101).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary also dismisses the King James and New King James Versions' additions in 1 John 5:7-8 as "obviously a late gloss with no merit" (Glenn Barker, Vol. 12, 1981, p. 353).

Peake's Commentary on the Bible is very incisive in its comments as well:

"The famous interpolation after 'three witnesses' is not printed in RSV and rightly [so] . . . No respectable Greek [manuscript] contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th century Latin text, it entered the Vulgate [the 5th-century Latin version, which became the common medieval translation] and finally NT[New Testament] of Erasmus [who produced newly collated Greek texts and a new Latin version in the 16th century]" (p. 1038).

The Big Book of Bible Difficulties tells us:

"This verse has virtually no support among the early Greek manuscripts . . . Its appearance in late Greek manuscripts is based on the fact that Erasmus was placed under ecclesiastical pressure to include it in his Greek NT of 1522, having omitted it in his two earlier editions of 1516 and 1519 because he could not find any Greek manuscripts which contained it" (Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, 2008, pp. 540-541).

Theology professors Anthony and Richard Hanson, in their book, *Reasonable Belief*:

A Survey of the Christian Faith, explain the unwarranted addition to the text this way: "It was added by some enterprising person or persons in the ancient Church who felt that the New Testament was sadly deficient in direct witness to the kind of doctrine of the Trinity which he favoured and who determined to remedy that defect ... It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament" (1980, p. 171).

Still, even the added wording does not by itself proclaim the Trinity doctrine. The addition, illegitimate though it is, merely presents Father, Word and Holy Spirit as witnesses. This says nothing about the personhood of all three since verse 7 shows inanimate water and blood serving as such.

Again, the word *Trinity* did not come into common use as a religious term until after the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, several centuries after the last books of the New Testament were complete. It is *not* a biblical concept.

Does the Seventh day Adventist Church Admit 1 John 5:7 has Added Text?

THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST BIBLE COMMENTARY:

“The passage as given in the KJV is in no Greek MS earlier than the 15th and 16th centuries. The disputed words found their way into the KJV by way of the Greek text of Erasmus (see Vol. V, p. 141). It is said that Erasmus offered to include the disputed words in his Greek Testament if he were shown even one Greek MS that contained them. A library in Dublin produced such a MS (known as 34), and Erasmus included the passage in his text. It is now believed that the later editions of the Vulgate acquired the passage by the mistake of a scribe who included an exegetical marginal comment in the Bible text that he was copying. The disputed words have been widely used in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, but, in view of such overwhelming evidence against their authenticity, their support is valueless and should not be used. In spite of their appearance in the Vulgate A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture freely admits regarding these words: “It is now generally held that this passage, called the Comma Johanneum, is a gloss that crept into the text of the Old Latin and Vulgate at an early date, but found its way into the Greek text only in the 15th and 16th centuries” (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951, p. 1186).” — (The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 675)

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE:

The Seventh day Adventist Biblical Research Institute also admits this text in 1 John 5:7 is added. So their final conclusion and advice to Seventh day Adventists was “...you should not use this text.”(<https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-nt-texts/1-john-57>)

So the SDA BRI and the SDA Bible Commentary both acknowledge this text is added and say it should not be used, and yet you see many Adventists and their key organizations continue to use this verse in their insistence to prove the trinity doctrine. So Seventh-day Adventists are not following their own advice.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST SABBATH SCHOOL QUARTERLY:

“In some versions of the Bible the words “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit’ and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth” appear in 1 John 5:7, 8 (NKJV). The only problem is they are a later addition, not found in the original manuscripts.

“Among biblical scholars there is agreement that this statement is not genuine and has been added, probably to support the doctrine of the Trinity...” — (Sabbath School Bible Study Guide: July – Sept 2009, p. 108)

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE:

Question about 1 John 5:7

Question: "Some years ago I had read some of your publications. At the time I seem to remember a discussion of the devinity of Christ. A refference to 1 John 5:7 was quoated but I cannot find it...can you please tell me where this strong scriptual argument is used? Thanking you in advance, dws"

Answer: "Thank you for contacting the Ellen G. White Estate. In answer to your question, though I have to tell you that I have not found any place in the published writings of Ellen G. White where she quotes this passage.

Perhaps that is just as well, because it may not be such a "strong scriptural argument" after all. The verse appears in no ancient Greek manuscript earlier than about the 13th century A.D. That is, despite its inclusion in the 1611 original of the King James Version translation into English, it is highly unlikely that it was in the *original* version of 1 John as John wrote it. No modern Bible translation that I am aware of includes it in the text except the New King James Version, and even this version carries a footnote about the text's absence from Greek manuscripts until relatively recent times. Apparently, it is some scribe's note to himself about the trinity, originally written in the margin of the manuscript he was copying, and later incorporated into the text by another scribe who may have been uncertain about whether or not it was a correction that belonged in the text; in any case, he opted to include it there." — (<http://ellenwhite.org/content/file/did-ellen-g-white-believed-doctrine-trinity#document>)

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST MINISTRY MAGAZINE:

R.M. Johnston: "The term "Trinity" is nowhere to be found in the Bible... Nor need we be disturbed by the knowledge that certain words in 1 John 5:7, 8 are spurious additions that found their way into our King James Version from certain manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate, where they originated. For while it is true that no formal statement of the doctrine can be found in the most reliable Biblical manuscripts, nevertheless a comparison of Scripture with Scripture makes any contrary teaching untenable." — (R. M. Johnston, Ministry, Nov 1964, What can we know about the Holy Trinity?)

Now as more of witnesses, please consider the SDA pioneers on this verse. EGW knew what they were saying about it and she never repudiated them.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST PIONEERS:

D.W. HULL: "The objector contends that Christ and his Father are one person, and in proof of his position quotes 1 John 5:7. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the

Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." This is claimed as very strong proof in support of the trinity. The three persons are spoken of as God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Ghost. I believe I may safely say that, aside from scripture, no such license would be allowable. Men have been so used to perverting scripture, and taking advantage of terms, and pressing them into their service, that they do not realize the magnitude of the crime as they otherwise would. The same expression is frequently used about man and wife; yet no person doubts that a man and his wife are two separate persons, inasmuch as they may be separated by hundreds of miles. Dr. A. Clarke expressly says that this passage [1 John 5:7] is an interpolation. See his Commentary in loco." — (D. W. Hull, Review and Herald November 10, 1859)

J.N. LOUGHBOROUGH:

"The word Trinity nowhere occurs in the Scriptures. The principal text supposed to teach it is '1 John i, 7, which is an interpolation. Clarke says, " Out of one hundred and thirteen manuscripts, the text is wanting in one hundred and twelve. It occurs in no MS. before the tenth century. And the first place the text occurs in Greek, is in the Greek translation of the acts of the Council of Lateran, held A. D. 1215."—Com. on John i, and remarks at close of chap." — (J.N. Loughborough, Adventist Review, and Sabbath Herald, November 5, 1861) https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/adl:349160/issue_pages (8/8 on the digital pdf)

G.C. TENNEY:

118 – Please explain 1 John 5:8. (1) Is the word "spirit" synonymous with Holy Ghost of verse 7? (2) What is the Holy Ghost? How do we receive it, through God of through angels? (3) Is the Comforter of John 16:7, 8 the Holy Ghost? If so, how can it be alluded to as "him" and "he" C.W. W.

"We might dispose of the first question by saying that the last portion of verse seven and the first portion of verse eight IS AN INTERPOLATION, and has no place in the sacred Scriptures. It is not in the Revised Version, and it is well understood by Biblical scholars that those words were inserted by some who desired to render more prominent AN ERRONEOUS IDEA OF THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY." (G.C. Tenney, RH June 9, 1896)

ELLEN WHITE CONFIRMS CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE TO SCRIPTURE ALSO:

"I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible; yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition." — (E.G. White, EW, 220.2, 1882)

So why are most Adventists ignorant of these facts and continually quote it? This text is also missing from 99% of all Bible translations.