

The Greater Witness – *John 5:31-47*

Introduction – We come to the end of Christ’s formal argument of His divinity and Sonship. And now Jesus will call His witnesses to the stand. The divine testimony, the greater witness, is the Father Himself (vv36-37) and this is centered upon three supplementary witnesses: John the Baptist, the signs of Christ’s works, and the Old Testament Scriptures.

As we walk through this text, think about those times when someone has said to you (or you have said yourself), “I just can’t believe the claims about Christianity and Jesus.” For the well-studied Sanhedrin among them, or the confident agnostic among us, these three witnesses are brought forth who testify themselves to the Father’s greater testimony that Jesus is the Son of God.

Overview – The Law required the witness of two or three others in order to establish a fact (Deut 19:15) and one’s own testimony was not valid (v31). But Jesus knew there was another who bore witness of Him and His claim (v32). John the Baptist was a witness, a “*burning and shining lamp*” testifying to the “*Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world*” (1:29) and yet Jesus does not lay His argument simply on the testimony of a man (vv33-35). The works which the Father has sent the Son to do bear witness, and particularly they bear witness that the Father sent the Son (vv36-37, cf. 3:16, 20:31). And the Scriptures give testimony to Him, but His listeners do not have the word abiding in them nor are they willing to come to Him (vv38-40). The problem is not that these men will not honor those who claim to come in the name of God; they are loyal to themselves and not to God, and so they will “*not seek the honor that comes from the only God*” (vv41-44). They act like they trust in Moses, but Moses will be their accuser, for if they really believed Moses, they would believe Jesus (vv45-47).

The Testimony of Man – Jesus did not need the testimony of John to self-consciously know Who He was. The preceding verses (5:19-30) emphasized His intimate knowledge of and relationship with the Father. Jesus mentions the Baptist’s testimony, not for His own sake, but for the sake of His hearers. John’s testimony was strong and well respected by the general public (Matt 21:23-27). God used John’s witness to bring many to faith in Christ (John 1:7).

The personal witness of someone you know and trust is a powerful tool that God uses to bring another to faith in Jesus Christ. We are to be prepared to give a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Pet 3:15), not so much to “defend” the faith (which doesn’t really need defending) but to be used by God to turn hearts to Christ. Do not be afraid to simply declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God, that He is the Way to the Father, that He is your Savior and Lord, and that His forgiveness and mercy is sweet. Your imperfect witness can be used by God to change someone’s eternal destiny. The messengers are always weaker than the Message.

The Testimony of Works – Jesus did not need the testimony of John, for He had a greater witness Who was displayed by the works He sent His Son to do (v36). His miracles confirm that the Father sent Him. His resurrection would specifically declare Him to be the Son of God (Rom 1:1-4, Acts 2:29-33, 1 Cor 15:3-4). Our personal testimonies and defense of the gospel may be imperfect. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a perfect and completely true declaration of His divinity and authority. And yet it remained unconvincing to some then – and now.

We should pause here and consider that there are two kinds of agnostics. The honest agnostic is troubled and searching. He knows he is not on solid ground and he wants his questions answered. He is ripe for the Gospel. The other agnostic is using his uncertainty and questions to hide from Christ, to fight off the testimonies around him, and to keep himself on the throne of his life. He shifts the blame of unbelief off of himself and on God. Hear the words of Jesus – “*You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life*” (v40). It is not that he cannot see the light; it is that he hates the Light (John 3:19-20). It doesn’t matter how convincing the argument is. This agnostic does not have an evidence problem; he has a moral problem...

The Testimony of the Father’s Word – ...and Jesus knows that with the religious rulers that is what He is dealing with. The Jews loved their religious scrolls – for all the wrong reasons. They thought in them they would possess eternal life (vv39-40). For them, they were magic-words, charms, instructions to be intricately followed, steps to heaven. One of their own said, “*the more study of the law, the more life, and that if a man gains for himself words of the law he has gained for himself life in the world to come*” (Carson, quoting Rabbi Hillel). Now there is some truth to this (Psalm 19:7-11). But there is a way to twist the point. Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17). Paul found that the law was not life-giving in itself (Rom 7:10). Rather, Jesus is “*the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rom 10:4). Any reading and study of the Scriptures that does not lead to knowing Christ is evidence that the Scriptures are not being read as they were meant.

The Word of God and the Word of God – The Father loved the world and so He sent His Son, the Word of God. The Scriptures (the Word of God) are the Father’s testimony to the same. They are “God-breathed” words, the very breath of God (2 Tim 3:16). Let us consider some implications of this truth for every disciple, every follower of Jesus, the Word of God.

1 – There is no true relationship with Jesus that is not a scriptural relationship – and there is no true relationship with scripture that does not bring you to Jesus. They are reciprocal (HT – Pastor Troy Martin). One cannot have a full and meaningful relationship with Jesus and not with His Word – that is nonsense.

2 – We must be loyal to the Scriptures just as Jesus is. That means there are no “hard verses” and no “embarrassing verses.” Paul condemned anyone, even angels, if they distorted the Gospel (Gal 1:8-10). Paul knew Who’s slave he was. Today, the Bible is condemned for being so archaic, so anti-science, so masculinist, so hetero-patriarchal, and even illegal (i.e. calling sodomy a sin). Loyalty is costly (John 15:20, 2 Tim 3:12).

3 – Studying the Bible with faith will hurt, for it is a sharp knife that reveals (Heb 4:12) and with prayer, this is how God searches you out (Psalm 139:23-24). Before the Good News there is always the Bad News which never honors you, but rather humbles you. That is what turned off the agnostics Jesus was speaking to (John 5:42-44). Often, the Word seems unclear, not because it is, but because you are hiding from it, trying to keep your unconfessed sins hidden. “*Search me, O God...*”

4 – Scripture reading, with faith, leads you to Jesus and not simply to truth-propositions. Be careful not to look to Scripture to see yourself, your life, your problems, your circumstances, etc. The Scriptures do not testify of you, they testify of your Savior. Find Jesus in the Scriptures and then find yourself in Christ, and then the Scriptures speak to you (Psalm 25:4-5, 119:18). For true disciples, this is the gift of communion with Christ as He opens the Scriptures to us (Luke 24:25-32). This is the testimony of the Father, one Book, dozens of hands, and yet one voice. And He gives it to you.

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