

John 32 – Testimony to the Christ

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 5:31-47 ESV)

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Scripture 2: (Deut. 19:15 ESV)

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

Sermon:

The whole of John chapter 5 is actually one interconnected story; it is like a legal case. It began with Jesus healing the paralytic at Bethesda as His third “Sign”, thereby demonstrating His sovereign authority as the Lord of the Sabbath. Healing during the Sabbath seemed to violate the divine prescription of rest and this alleged transgression is what initially prompted the Jews to begin persecuting Jesus (5:16). Yet when Jesus responded to their complaint, saying *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."* (Jn. 5:17 ESV), it led to the Jews *"...seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."* (Jn. 5:18 ESV). Then, Jesus defended Himself and justified His activity by clearly explaining Who He is and what His work is.

So, after claiming to be both God's Son and the “Son of Man” from Daniel's night vision (Daniel 7:13), a claim which His Jewish hearers would also have immediately considered blasphemy and reasonable justification for their charge against Him, Jesus next says, *"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true."*, meaning {If I am the only one saying this about me, then my testimony is not be considered reliable or believable and should not be accepted as true.}. What He is really saying is, “Do not trust me and my Word simply because I am the one saying it.”, “Do not not just accept my Word as a matter of faith because there is actually a lot of evidence proving why you should believe me.”.

Taking everything about Christianity “on faith” is a complaint which many people levy against Christians, arguing that we have little to no firm evidence related to our religion.

- They say that we take the simple fact of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection on faith but, while there is no verified tomb or physical evidence of His death (since He did not stay dead), we do have eyewitness testimony to His death and resurrection preserved in Scripture. Meanwhile, the official act of Jesus' execution by the Roman government at the order of Pontius Pilate, has also never been seriously disputed. Then we have later testimonies documented by enemies of Christianity [like Josephus (Antiquities 18:63, 20:200), Pliny the Younger's letter to the Emperor Trajan¹]; affirming Jesus' factual existence and lasting impact which mention beliefs, practices, and other testimonies about early Christian martyr's .
- They say we take the reliability of our Scriptures on faith; that our assertive claims about their inerrancy {free from errors, mistakes, or falsehoods in the autographs} and infallibility {that the truths taught are reliable and that the promises of God contained within Scripture will never fail to be achieved} are impossible. However, documentary evidence continues to grow in support of Scripture's accurate transmission and preservation. We keep finding more older New Testament manuscripts which match more recent copies. The Dead Sea scrolls, which date from the 1st and 2nd Centuries BC, have been thoroughly examined and those manuscripts have been found to match the more recent, “standardized” Masoretic text of the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures {apart from the “vowel points” which were the Masorete's innovation to the written text}, which have been used since the 6th Century AD.
- They say that our Bible, with its Canon of sixty-six books (39 Old Testament/27 New Testament), is merely a collection of man-made and humanly decided books of wisdom. They argue that during the 4th Century AD, “the Church” edited, chose, redacted, and tried to destroy certain texts that did not suit its “preferred narratives”, thereby rejecting and suppressing “alternative gospels” and “other truths” about Jesus as heresy. It is true that numerous texts were rejected as heresy {such as the Gospel of Thomas}, while others were declared to be non-canonical {like the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas} yet still

1 <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/pliny>

beneficial, edifying, and helpful {like First Clement}, different lists of accepted canonical texts were circulated by several of the Ancient Church Fathers before the 4th Century. But ultimately, the New Testament canon which was finally affirmed, only consisted of the books which were universally accepted and used as Scripture by the Church. This is why whenever we speak about the Canon, we are careful to say that we have “received” these texts, rather than we “chose” them because we believe that these texts were specifically selected, protected, and preserved by the Holy Spirit for us; a fact testified to by the ancient Church's universal agreement and acceptance of them as authoritative.

We have a lot more evidence supporting our faith than one might otherwise expect. The point is, we have evidence and we have very good reason to believe the things we believe about God, about Jesus, and about the Holy Scriptures. So, while our salvation is by Faith alone, in Christ alone, our faith in Jesus is not something held by blind-faith alone; our faith is supported through reasoned, accepted, and proven evidence that justifies our belief.

So, in order to prove His defense and conclude His argument, Jesus tells us plainly, {Do not just take my word for it, because I do not say this alone.}. He freely admits that “self-serving testimony” is not considered credible {which has become a principle in modern law} while “self-incriminating testimony” is considered credible.

It is our sinful, human nature which causes us to exaggerate or embellish the truth in order to make ourselves look better. Therefore, we place very little weight upon the positive things a person says about themselves, often dismissing it as mere bragging, unless there is more credible evidence to support their claims.

So next, Jesus calls witnesses to defend His claim of divine authority of judgment and ability to do good works on the Sabbath. However, since according to Jewish law, “*Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*” and His claims would be blasphemy and punishable by death, if untrue, He calls three specific expert witnesses whose authority and credibility could not be denied. Thus Jesus declares, “*There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.*”

The first witness He calls is John the Baptist, bringing back to our remembrance when, “*...the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"*” (Jn. 1:19 ESV), causing him to confess that he was not the Christ and tell them that, “*I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.*” (Jn. 1:26-27 ESV), accusing them of not recognizing the Messiah even though He stood within their midst. Then John publicly testified about Jesus proclaiming “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (Jn. 1:29 ESV), and further testifying, “*I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.*” (Jn. 1:32-34 ESV).

So, the Baptist was an “expert witness” selected by the other side. The Jews, the priests and Pharisees, all went to John because they believed he had authority. They understood that he was a true prophet; a status which Jesus affirms and emphasizes by saying that John “*...was a burning and shining lamp, and you [Jesus' detractors] were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.*”. The Baptist was a witness whose testimony they believed was credible, therefore his testimony helped to build Jesus' case.

Next, Jesus moved onto His second witness, “*But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that*

the Father has sent me.”. The next witness that testifies in support of His divinity claim were all the “Signs”; all of the works, wonders, and miracles that Jesus was doing in both Galilee and Jerusalem:

- His changing the water into wine, changing ritual waters into the wine of celebration, provided evidence of His covenant mediatorial authority;
- His healing of the royal official's son merely through the declaration of His authoritative word, provided evidence of His authority as the divine *Logos*, as the Creator who spoke all of creation into existence;
- His healing of the paralytic provided evidence of His sovereign authority as the LORD of the Sabbath;
- Meanwhile, His driving of the money changers and sacrifice sellers out of the Temple courts was enough evidence for the Pharisee and “*ruler of the Jews*”, Nicodemus to confess that “*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.*” (Jn. 3:2 ESV).

No one ever denied the fact of His miracles in the Gospels, even while they recorded the denial of the miracles' meaning. So, by doing these miracles publicly, by performing these signs and wonders, Jesus proved His power and capability as a prophet and as the Son of Man, their hoped for Davidic Messiah-king.

Jesus' third and final witness testifying to the fact that He was sent from God for this purpose, is the LORD God Himself. “*And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.*” However, “*His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.*”. The third witness testifying to the truth about Jesus is the evidence of Scripture: evidence which they were sinfully refusing to believe or trust, the *Verbum Dei* (the Word of God). They did not believe, understand, or accept what Scripture prophesied about Jesus, leading Him to counter-charge them with blasphemous failure to trust God's promises, “*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*”.

Jesus compares His detractors to the Israelites of the exodus; to those who initially heard the LORD speak from within the cloud atop the mountain, but who were so terrified and afraid that they begged Him to stop and to only speak to them through a mediator, Moses (Exodus 20:18-19). However, if they had really heard, listened to, and received what God had said, then they would not have done what they did next. They proved that they did not have “*...His Word abiding in [them]...*” because:

- They proved that they did not accept the LORD's authority because they immediately crafted an idol to worship, while Moses was up on the mountain talking with God (Exodus 32); and,
- They proved that they did not trust the LORD's command to take possession of Canaan because of their fear of men. They wanted to elect a new leader and return to bondage in Egypt instead (Numbers 14:1-4), because they did not believe the promises of God which Moses brought them.

Now, the Jews were proving the same thing again because, just like the ancient Israelites, they also did not believe Moses; they refused to believe the testimony of Scripture concerning Jesus. Jesus said, “*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life...*”, because Moses wrote, “*You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*” (Lev. 18:5 ESV). They wrongly believed that they could earn life by keeping all of God's rules perfectly, but they misunderstood the reason why God gave them so many detailed (and seemingly convoluted) rules: not for them to keep, but to prove that they cannot keep them all.

That was Paul's argument in Romans, that this intricate Law was given “*to increase the trespass*” (Rom. 5:20 ESV): making it impossible for sinful humanity, for us, to claim to be righteous on account of our own obedience and so that “*...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” (Rom. 5:20-21 ESV).

Then Jesus continues explaining, “*...and it is they [the Scriptures] that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*”, leading to the other half of why the Law was so difficult: to drive us into the arms of Jesus Christ, the “second Adam” and our righteous mediator, the only Man able to perfectly keep the Law and share His righteousness with us, through His mercy and grace. God gave us the Law through Moses, so that we would be forced to admit that we cannot do it on our own. The rules were not given to make eternal life possible, but to make eternal life something we cannot achieve ourselves, so that we would look to Christ and put our faith and hope in His perfect obedience.

But the Jews could not see Jesus' righteousness. They did not recognize Him as the “woman's seed” who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). They did not understand or believe the prophets because they did not recognize Isaiah's prophecies being fulfilled within the signs that Jesus did (Isaiah 35:4-10; 61:1-3) nor did they accept them as evidence of Him being the “*...one like a son of man...*” (Dan. 7:13 ESV) to whom the Ancient of Days gave authority, power and dominion, as seen in Daniel's vision.

Yet regardless of whether or not the Jews accepted it, these three witnesses could not be argued with because the evidence was made publicly plain for everyone to see. However, even when the evidence is not questionable, the interpretation of the evidence may still be disputed. So, we are very blessed because we have the Holy Spirit and the evangelist interpreting it for us, but not everyone was as fortunate, like Jesus' detractors here.

Jesus calls them out for their hypocrisy, attacking their credibility and authority to judge Him, “*I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*”

Glory, honor, and respect; three synonyms describing something desired greatly. People have valued, sought, and tried to claim these for themselves since time immemorial. We teach that: “Respect is earned, not given.” or “Give respect, get respect.” and concerning our governing authorities, we are told that we ought to honor and respect the “Office” regardless of who sits in it (1 Peter 2:17).

But what is the source of glory? Is glory something we can create or increase truly, or is it something that is just redistributed?

The whole of Scripture shows and teaches us that it is the LORD God who possesses all glory and honor; meanwhile, to Him all glory and honor is owed. All of the glory belongs to God, for everything, always.

So, what is glory, really?

The Hebrew term for glory is *kavod* and it describes a sense of great “weightiness”, an abundance of value {closer in use to the Greek *time'*}; suggestive of glory involving the carrying of burdensome responsibility. Whereas the Greek term for glory is *doxa* {from which we get the Doxology that we sing every Sunday} and it describes a sense of radiant splendor {closer in use to the Hebrew *hadar*}; suggesting a visible, awe inspiring brilliance of light. { *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the **son of man** that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with **glory and honor.*** (Ps. 8:3-5 ESV)}

Considering these two expressions of glory:

- possessing the most burdensome weight of authority, like the Greek Atlas resting the world upon his shoulders; and
- being the most brilliant, radiant light shining in the midst of darkness, like the Sun;

they offer the simplest depiction of God's glory. Human glory is merely a received sliver of God's glory, given and shared as an appointed and ordained authority with responsibility subordinate to and flowing from the divine source (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, we respect, honor, and obey everyone with authority over us, our: parents, employers, governors, and emperors or presidents (WSC #64); so long as the exercise of their commands remain in accord with the revealed will of God (Acts 5:29).

Whenever Scripture speaks about us giving God glory and honor, it describes us giving back something that is already His own. Giving God the glory means that we must humble ourselves necessarily because, in returning the limited glory that He has shared with us (Isaiah 24:15; Revelation 21:26), we diminish our own glory as a vassal to our Sovereign. So, when Jesus says “*I do not receive glory from people.*” it is because His glory is actually God's glory, yet the Jews: the ones who should be glorifying Him as the LORD gladly, particularly since He “*...[came] in [the] Father's name...*”; they refused to receive Him because they were a proud, stiff-necked people who preferred to “*... receive glory from one another...*”. Their failure to accept Jesus proved the lack of love for the LORD in their heart. It further proved their lack of fidelity to the one true King because previously, the Jews had rejected and killed His ambassadors and emissaries (in the person of the prophets), and now they were rejecting His Son. Instead of seeking the glory and favor of God, they preferred the second-hand glory and favor of sinful, self-righteous and self-justifying men. They preferred to trade an ever diminishing glory; one which is constantly fading and dissipating out into the world before it is returned to God by the inanimate creation (2 Corinthians 3).

However Jesus, the just Judge, did not bear a grudge against them nor would He hold this against them, telling them “*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father.*”. He is not the one who will accuse them in the divine court, because they have another accuser. He warns them that “*There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.*”.

- They claimed to trust Moses. They claimed to trust and obey his word. They expected that through obeying and keeping his commandments, they would earn eternal life (v 39). They wanted Moses' glory but they had no legitimate claim upon it because, as Jesus explained to them “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*”.
- They claimed to believe Moses, the man whom they knew brought God's Word and Holy Commandments to Israel: the man “*whom the LORD knew face to face*” (Deut. 34:10 ESV). Yet when a prophet “*like Moses*” appeared with God's Word in His mouth, speaking all that the LORD commanded Him, they refused to listen to Him; so, God would judge and condemn them for their failure. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)
- They knew Moses' writings, and even though they believed that his words were true, but they did not believe them. They did not follow them or understand them, which is why they did not recognize, receive, or believe Jesus Christ.

Please understand that the ancient Israelites of Moses' day and the Jews of Jesus' time were not that different in disbelieving the evidence before them:

- Like John the Baptist, the ancient Israelites had Aaron, who told them Moses was sent by the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He told them why he believed this, because God had called him out into the wilderness to come find his long lost brother, exiled for forty years (Exodus 4:27), but they did not believe Aaron and obey God.
- Like the many signs that Jesus was doing, the ancient Israelites saw all of the miracles, wonders, and signs that Moses performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet they did not believe the signs and they did not obey God.
- Like reading and hearing the Scriptures, the ancient Israelites heard God Himself speak to them from the top of Mount Sinai, but even still they did not believe God's Word and they did not obey the LORD.

Truly, the Jews of Jesus' day were little different from the Israelites of Moses' day, and if they were so alike to their ancestors, then perhaps today, we Christians also run the risk of the same disbelief. Today:

- We have Pastors who preach Jesus Christ and the Whole Counsel of God every week, but do we really believe them? Do we listen and earnestly repent of and mortify our sins, seeking to obey God? Do we truly seek to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, as we should love God?
- We no longer have extraordinary, spectacular miracles, wonders, or signs being performed in the world around us; instead, we rely upon the testimonies of eyewitnesses who experienced them two thousand years ago. But, do we believe their testimony well enough to recognize and see the “ordinary” miracles that still happen all around us: births, the healing of illness, comfort and peace when mourning, our daily provision of food and water and air and sunshine, or the salvation and regeneration of those who once were lost? Do we give glory to God for these miracles, knowing that apart from His Will and Power none of it would be possible? Do we believe this and so, obey and love the LORD?
- We possess the completed canon of Scripture, received and used by the Church Fathers since the lifetime of the Apostles, but do we believe that they are still the only true and relevant and authoritative Scripture in our present, modern lives? Do we believe the testimony of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Evangelists, and the other writers of Scripture? Do we know it and believe it well enough to live according to the truth it contains? Are we willing to believe that our Bible, containing the words of Jesus and is the written Word of God, tells us the “...*words of eternal life*...” (John 6:68); words which if we obey them and truly have *pisteuo* in Jesus Christ, as they command, trusting in Him alone, that by them we shall live (Leviticus 18:5)?

These are the questions we each must answer: Do I believe this? and Do I live my life this way?

Jesus has made His case for why we should believe Him. He has presented the evidence to us and we, the jury, must decide whether or not we believe Jesus' testimony, that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man and therefore, the righteous Judge of all mankind at whose Word, the dead shall be raised: the wicked to an eternal life of condemnation in the Lake of Fire and the Elect to an eternal life of blessedness in Christ's eternal Kingdom.

The decision is yours and the time for it is now. What is your verdict?

Is Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath and the just Judge of Mankind?

AMEN