

Five Witnesses

John 5:30-47

³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

³¹ If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,

³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

³⁹ 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.

⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people.

⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (Joh 5:16-47 ESV)

Belief and Unbelief

If you believe in Christ, why do you believe in him? If you do not believe in him, why don't you? I want to look at these two questions before diving into the text this morning. First, if you believe in Christ, why do you believe in him? Most scholars and polls reveal that the overwhelming answer today is that people believe in Christ because they took an irrational leap in the dark. A 1980 Gallup Poll says, "We are having a revival of feelings but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment."

Christian apologists agree. J.P. Moreland writes, "I'm always encouraged to use my intellect in how I approach my vocation, select a house, or learn to use a computer. But within the sphere of my private, spiritual life of faith, it is my heart, and my heart alone, that operates." R.C. Sproul says,

“We live in what may be the most anti-intellectual period in the history of western civilization.” And the famous atheist **Bertrand Russell** once said, “Most Christians would rather die than to think, in fact they do.”

This year, for the first time in history, it looks like a Mormon will gain the nod as the presidential candidate of one of the two major political parties (I learned this week that Joseph Smith actually tried to run for President, but he didn't get the nod). Five years ago, this could not have happened. But so much has changed in five years in our country, that Mormonism is now viewed by almost everyone as simply another denomination within Christianity. I bring this up only because the Mormons are the classic example of faith as a leap in the dark.

You have heard of the famous “burning in the bosom?” What is it? A MormonWiki says that, “In answer to our prayers, the Holy Ghost will teach us through our feelings and thoughts... Heavenly Father will answer prayers, typically through feelings of their hearts and thoughts in their minds.”¹ A professor at BYU writes, “I would never tell anybody to try to prove the Book of Mormon is true through physical evidence, just because of the way metaphysics and epistemology, it's not possible. And so, you have to get the testimony some other way, and then the evidence will become very clear.”² Perhaps one Mormon blogger put it best to a person struggling with reading through the OT, “I hope your

¹ http://www.mormonwiki.org/Burning_in_the_bosom.

² Ibid. John E. Clark (Professor of Anthropology and Director of the New World Archeological Foundation, BYU)

testimony isn't based off of what you read. Especially not the Old Testament.”³

More specifically, “The Mormon idea of the ‘internal testimony of the Holy Spirit’ is such that a person feels new information and identifies it as the Spirit.”⁴ Mormon missionaries are taught to ask people visiting the Mormon temple, “How do you feel when you are on Temple Square?” Then they explain to them which feelings are from God and which are not from God. The heart of the Mormon religion is “feelings.” You are asked to accept Mormonism not because of its truth claims, but by how you feel about it after you go home and pray. And yet when you ask many Christians why they believe, their answers are not much different. Christians today believe because of feelings, not truth. Like Engelbert Humperdinck sang, “Feelings. Nothing more than feelings. Woo woo woo feelings.” Frankly, this explains why so many of our churches are and heavy on entertainment and light on substance, though Engelbert is not exactly what they are playing these days.

The reaction against this is the kind of irrational faith is an atheism that sets itself up as the only rational belief to hold. It acts like it alone is the intellectual view. Enlightened people, you see, don't believe. People of reason, intelligence, and science don't believe because religion is opposed to reason and faith is opposed to intelligence.

³ <http://theboard.byu.edu/questions/36902/>

⁴ Ibid.

Of course, this presupposes something pretty fundamental. It presupposes that God has not spoken to us or given us witnesses. It tells us what it must look like if God decided to speak to us, and clearly, the way the Bible describes God's speech, this is NOT the way it is supposed to look. Therefore, God has not spoken to us. It throws out all rational biblical evidence before it is ever even called before the court of human opinion. And that really gets at the heart of the matter. As **C.S. Lewis** puts it, for this kind of view, it is **God in the dock** (on trial) before human judges, not the other way around.

Five Witnesses

The Christian religion is utterly reasonable. **Jesus does not ask anyone to suspend reason**, to check their brain at the door, or to make an irrational leap in the dark concerning belief in him. In fact, his stance is the opposite as we will see today. But **neither will he allow us to pretend that God has not in fact spoken clearly** on spiritual matters such as who he is, who his Son is, and the work they are doing together. What he does to solve both problems we create for ourselves is to tell us about **many witnesses** that have been given to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that he is to be believed upon.

The passage today gives us **five witnesses** outside of our own experience that confirm that Jesus is who he says he is. They are: **Himself** (**John 5:31, 36a, 43, 47**); **John the Baptist** (**5:32-35**); **the works** he is performing (**36b**), the **Father** (**37-38**), and the **Holy Scripture** (**39, 45-46**). In actuality, there are two more witnesses in the book of John, making a perfect

number of seven. The other two are the Holy Spirit (John 15:26) and the disciples (15:27; cf. Acts 1:8). Let's take a look at these five witnesses.

The Witness of Christ

The first witness is Jesus himself. Of course, Jesus is making all kinds of claims that are making the Pharisees angry. He will destroy the temple and raise it in three days. He does the works of the Father. He is one with God. Based solely upon who he is, later, in John 8:14 he will say, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is true." His own witness is enough to believe simply because he is God. But is this enough for *you* to believe him? For most, it is not. And really, it shouldn't be.

Think about David Koresh, the Sun Myung Moon, Joseph Smith, Jim Jones, Muhammad, or any number of people making claims to be God or to be speaking for God. They are a witness, but the only witness they give is that of themselves. "Believe me," they say *because I said so*. Now, it is of course true that they have great powers of persuasion. But persuasion is not a witness, it is a manipulative tool. Perhaps they do some kinds of wonders. The Pharisees themselves knew about wonder workers, but when it came to Jesus' miracles, many were saying that only a man from God could do such things. Cult leaders have another power behind them, but that power is demonic. Thus, when it comes down to it, you really only have their word to take on it and that of a demon. Not very trustworthy, is it?

It is interesting that Josephus tells us about several people in his own day (post-resurrection, pre-70AD) who went around

claiming to be the Messiah and deluding many people. One, a man named **Theudas**, said that **he was a prophet** who wanted people to baptize in the Jordan and that he would part the waters just like Moses, but Fadus, one of the civil leaders of Judea, sent a squadron and chopped off the man's head and it amounted to nothing (*Ant.* XX. 97–99, also 171–172 and *Bel.* ii. 258–265).

I bring these false teachers up because **John 5:43**, when Jesus returns to his own authoritative witness, he says, “**If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.**” How true it is and has been throughout the ages that people will so easily follow a man like this, but one like Jesus the leaders are so quick to dismiss. This is a direct attack on the Pharisees, who were quick to follow almost anyone who came claiming to be the deliverer, claiming to be the truth, claiming to be from God. But they would not have anything to do with Jesus once they found out the things he was saying.

While Jesus' testimony is enough, because of who he is (God cannot lie), he does not rest his claims on himself alone, and this is critical. **Vs. 30** says, “**I can do nothing on my own.**” This includes even being a witness. Thank God that Jesus follows the law even here. According to the law, it has to be on **the testimony of two or three witnesses** that something is established (**Deut 19:15**). Jesus never breaks the law, and so he

Ant Josephus (*Ant.*: *Antiquities*; *Ap.*: *Against Apion*; *Bel.*: *War*; *Vita*: *Life*).

Bel Josephus (*Ant.*: *Antiquities*; *Ap.*: *Against Apion*; *Bel.*: *War*; *Vita*: *Life*).

gives more witnesses than are even needed. And he does this, he says, so that people might believe in him.

The Witness of John the Baptist

This is especially the case with **John the Baptist**, who is **the second witness**. In one way, John is a unique witness, for he is a mere man.⁵ Jesus explains the problem with John saying, “**Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved**” (**John 5:34**). It is critical to say that Jesus’ deity is not true because some guy says it is. This is not a matter of human opinion. For, which human could ever be certain *in himself* of anything about God? And even if he was, why should anyone else believe him? Jesus refers to John as a “burning lamp,” yet the Evangelist refers to Jesus as the very Light of the world. This shows Christ’s greatness over John.

Nevertheless, Jesus lists John as a witness. He really is a light from God, even if he is not “The Light.” He explains the reason for including John, “**So that you may be saved.**” The logic is, “**Since Jesus’ audience had accepted John as unquestionably truthful and accurate, the logic of the situation demanded that they should believe his verdict concerning Jesus.**”⁶ John as a witness has already been established in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. Remember all that was said, “**He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him**” (**John 1:7**). “**John bore witness**

⁵ It is true that Moses is brought up later. “Moses” seems to be a synecdoche for “Scripture.”

⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 108.

about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me’” (1:15). “John bore witness: ‘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’” (1:32-34).

This last one is important because it is a segue to the fourth witness, that of the Father. We’ll look at this in a moment.

Notice now that John did not know him at first. Even though he was his own cousin, it has to be revealed to him by God. Thus, even John’s witness is not in and of itself something that comes from God. It comes from God. People followed John and listened to him, except when he spoke about Jesus. Now, they won’t believe him, and so Jesus offers more witnesses, even though John’s testimony is true.

The Witness of Jesus’ Works: Miracles and Teaching

For a moment Jesus returns to his own testimony to prove that his testimony is greater than John’s (5:36), because the works he is doing are the works of the Father. The **third witness** is that of **the works** Jesus is doing. These speak for themselves. Like John the Baptist, whom they in fact did receive as a prophet from God and therefore should have believed regarding his testimony about Jesus, the same is true of the miracles. You may remember Nicodemus who was an unbelieving Pharisee at the time. He said, “**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” (3:2) We saw some of them say the same thing in John 9, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” (9:16). All Jesus is doing is pointing out what they already know. That is one of the extremely important facts about these witnesses. In fact, he is using their own words against them. “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” (5:36).

I’m not sure I can point this out strongly enough to you. It is critical that you see how the Pharisees already know this, just like they knew that John was a prophet. The problem is not the witness, but their failure to believe it, *even though they know that they should*. Do you see the difference? The problem here is moral not rational. They do not believe the witness because they do not like the implications of it. And they do not like the implications of it, not because it isn’t true, but because it will force them to be confronted with the sin in their lives which remains unrepentant.

I think about **Korah**, the cousin of Moses. He knew that Moses was from God, but when Moses began to tell them that they must listen to Moses and not Korah, Korah got furious. He wanted to be in charge. He wanted to lead the people. In fact, he had some rights, because he was a priest designated so by God. But he was not Moses and for his defiance of God’s authority, God put him, his rabble, and all of his family to death in a violent upheaval where the earth opened up and swallowed them all alive. The point is, Jesus is greater than

Moses, but the people do not want to accept this. In fact, this has a connection with the fifth witness as Jesus will bring up **in a moment**.

Before moving on to the fourth and fifth witnesses, I want to point out another work Jesus is doing. It is **not only the miracles**, but **also his teaching** which are part of the works that testify to Christ. And again, the Pharisees knew it. Matthew records the Pharisees admitting, “**Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances**” (**Matt 22:16**). This takes us to something Jesus says here in John.

In **verse 41** Jesus returns to himself. “**I do not receive glory from people**,” he says. And this is exactly what they knew to be true. They admitted as much. Their conclusion (albeit a sarcastic one) was that his teaching was true and Godly. How strange it is that people will admit things about Jesus up to a point, but when he begins to confront them on the deep levels of their sin or to talk about his own unique status as God, they quickly turn against him. You see, if how God reveals himself were up to you, **you would never choose a revelation** that forced you to repent of anything. Who would do that? Yet, people know instinctively that Jesus’ miracles and teaching were from God. It is an objective witness that **they believe but will not receive**. Their belief stops at the point of Satan’s and they will not turn to God for forgiveness.

The Witness of the Father

The **fourth witness** is that of **the heavenly Father**. There may be a connection with John the Baptist in something that Jesus says, as well as a connection with the fifth witness—the Scriptures—in something else that he says. Let's look at this. Jesus says, “**The Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me**” (**John 5:37**). Jesus then adds, “**His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen.**” It is possible that the first, “**His voice you have never heard**” is a reference to the **voice of the Father heard by John at Jesus' baptism** (**Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22**). They didn't hear the voice, but John did. The people heard something, but they did not understand it (**John 12:28**). The problem is that John's Gospel does not mention the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism. We know about it from the Synoptics.

Thus, some have argued that there is a bridge here between the witness of the Father and that of the Scripture—the OT. The claim is that “**His voice you have never heard**” goes back to people like Moses who heard God's voice (**Ex 33:11**).⁷ Likewise, the idea of the “**form you have never seen**” goes back to Moses who saw God face to face or to Jacob who wrestled with God (**Gen 32:30, 31**).⁸ I'm not sure what to do with this claim, because in the commentaries, each of the proof-texts given seem to me to refer to seeing and hearing the Son, not the Father.

It does seem to be the case that besides John the Baptist and the Disciples, some in the OT did hear God the Father. I

⁷ The *CONTUNT* gives the following references: Gen 7:1–4; 12:1–3; Ex 3:4–4:17; 19:3–6, 9–13; 33:11; 1 Sam 3:4, 6, 8, 11–14; 1 Kgs 19:13, 15–18.

⁸ The *CONTUNT* gives the following references: Gen 18:1–2; 32:24–30; Ex 33:11; Isa 6:1–5.

think of Isaiah, for example, who gets the word of the LORD which speaks about “my servant.” If the servant is Jesus, then it is almost certainly the Father than is speaking about him (unless Jesus speaks in the third person about himself like Jimmy from Seinfeld). Likewise, it is probable that a couple of people in the OT saw God the Father, including Moses who sees his backside and Daniel who sees the Ancient of Days. Neither is said to have seen his face, which coincides with John’s insistence that no one has ever “seen God” (**John 1:18**).⁹

Jesus’ point, however, is that the Pharisees have not seen or heard the Father, yet the Father has testified about the Son that he is telling the truth. But if they have never seen him nor heard him, then how can Jesus use the Father as a witness? The point is, just like the previous witnesses, they should have known that the Father spoke to people in the past and that he bore witness about the Son. Here Jesus introduces the fifth witness, the Scripture.

The Witness of the Scripture (Moses and the OT)

In **John 5:38** Jesus adds a third problem, “... and you do not have his word abiding in you.” This statement is also related to something in the OT, and Jesus answer proves it. Moses says to Joshua, “**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night**” (**Josh 1:8**). The “Book of the Law” refers to the five books of Moses. It is a synonym for the Word of God. **Psalm 119:11**

⁹ Also **1 John 4:12**. Paul apparently makes the same point about the Father saying, “... who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (**1 Tim 6:16**). The point may not be that it is impossible altogether to see the Father, but that no one may see the Father in his pure essence. If, however, he condescends to clothe himself in a vision, why couldn’t someone see him?

says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” The strange thing is, the Pharisees would have been the first people on the planet to think that they had.

Jesus tells them why they haven't. The **Scripture is the fifth witness** for Jesus, but they have not believed its testimony. “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” (5:39-40).

They do not believe in the one whom the Father sent, but they should have, because they say they believe the Scripture.

Again, this is like the other witnesses in that they love the witness but then hate its message, thereby showing that they don't really love the witness either. But Christ is the sum and substance of God's word as Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). And of course, John has already told us that Christ is the Word/*logos*.

John 5:39-40 are such remarkable and important verse that I am going to **preach an entire sermon on them next week.**

They give us the key to reading our Bibles. The Scripture bear witness about Jesus. What “Scripture” is he talking about?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Acts and Paul's letters, Peter, James, Jude and Revelation? No. He is talking about

our OT, the only “Scripture” available to a Pharisees at this time. **The OT bears witness about Jesus.** He is its message.

They **foretold, typified, taught, and embodied** the person now standing before them doing the works of the Father.

It was all **told beforehand.** It was told where he would be born, what kind of a birth he would have, where he would live,

where he would minister, who he would come to, what kinds of things he would teach and do, how he would die, and that he would rise from the dead. Why, in John's Gospel alone "no less than eighteen unmistakable references to the Old Testament occur in the text of JOHN, most of which are given a direct application to Christ, and there are other allusions in addition."¹⁰ The NT does not just make stuff up about Jesus, but continually and insistently explains him from the OT. He was **typified** like the image of Abraham Lincoln on a penny (except in this case the penny, remarkably, came first) in OT sacrificial ceremonies, celebratory feast days, clean and unclean distinctions, stories undergone by prophets and patriarchs, and in many other ways. They typified him for us in the very actions commanded, stories explained, or persons named in the text. He was **taught** about in the Law of Moses. All of the law reflects his holiness and the way he would come to do business on earth, and he was the giver of that very Law. And he was especially **there** as a character in the narrative itself. For he is Israel's "angel," its "prince," the one who oversaw them, led them out of Egypt, made a covenant with them, forgave their sin, fought to give them the Promised Land, was enthroned above the Ark of the Covenant. He spoke to Hagar, wrestled with Jacob, ate with Abraham, fought for Joshua, and came to Manoah. Indeed, the whole Scripture **testifies** to and about Christ.

¹⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 111.

But along with the rest, they would not have even its testimony, the very book that they held so sacred, that they studied like no other and esteemed above all else. Jesus said that their problem was they viewed the Scripture as an end to itself rather than as a means to the end of seeing the Savior. Yes, it is possible to worship the Bible but not the God in it. So many people do this today as well, be they fundamentalists that pick and choose laws to obey and think they are righteous because of it, or liberals who try to dissect the book into a million pieces in order to destroy its message, or Reformed people who use it as simply a book of theology, or Evangelicals that turn it into a cook book, a science book, a book of morals or almost anything other than the book about Jesus. No one is immune from worshiping the Scripture rather than the One to whom it points. None of you must do this. You must not take pride in your knowledge of God, but in the God who has given you knowledge. If you must boast, boast in the Lord who gave you all things. Get your glory from Jesus.

Believe the Witnesses

Jesus tells us exactly why he explains to us the witnesses. It is “so that you may be saved” (John 5:34). Yes, Jesus cares about your salvation. He wants you to be saved. But it means believing the many objective witnesses that tell you about him.

He does not ask you to take a radical leap into the void of irrationality and mysticism. He does not expect you to check your brain at the door. But he does expect you to believe the witnesses that speak about him. But he does not permit you to

do so on your own terms, because then you will be like the Pharisees, cold hearted and hardened against the Son of Man. For he does not act the way you wish or expect that he would. And your expectations will preclude even listening to the witnesses in the first place. Jesus gets at this when he says, “**I do not receive glory from people**” (5:41). He does not act in ways to please you or I. He only acts to please his Father in heaven. In this he is wholly unlike anyone that has ever lived. So, he expects you to listen to the witnesses, to follow them, and to see how they do in fact scream out to you, “**Jesus is God, the Only Begotten God of the Father, full of grace and truth.**”

Please understand something else. It is **not the acceptance of the testimony** that makes it true or false. People often confuse this. People think they did a poor job explaining Christ *because* someone doesn't believe it. An argument is not good because it is believed, but because it is sound. A witness is not true because it is accepted, but because it is accurate. The witness corresponds to reality. These five (indeed seven) witnesses correspond perfectly to reality. Their testimony is true. Their arguments are sound. Their subject is the only God in the flesh who comes to save people from their sins.

Following down the trail of not believing them is perilous. This trail begins with a sign. The sign says, “**I do not love God.**” Jesus tells them bluntly, “**I know that you do not have the love of God within you**” (5:42). Why? Because you do not receive me, though you would receive anyone else that comes in his own name.

The lack of love is itself caused by a desire to receive the glory of someone other than God. You care more about them or it than him. You put your hope and trust in someone or something else. This is where you find your fulfillment, not in Christ alone. This in turn causes you not to believe in Christ. “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (5:44).

All that is left, then, is judgment, a major theme of the earlier half of chapter 5. What then happens is that one of the witnesses ends up accusing you before the Father. **Do not think I will accuse you to the Father.**” Why? He doesn’t have to. In the case of the Pharisees, their own book will judge them. **“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”** (5:45-46). How terrible to believe in the witness rather than the one to whom the witness is pointing!

Like the rest of Scripture, this message is **not only for those who have never believed** upon Christ. We all long to be saved, to make it to the end. To make your subjective assurance sure, you also need to believe upon the witnesses, to listen to them, to follow them, and to trust their testimony.

If you believe only because of a burning in your bosom, then when will happen to you when that burning goes away? Many are tormented with a lack of assurance. They live in a constant fear of not knowing if God has really saved them or not. The witnesses are an objective standard that tell you, **“If**

you believe the Son, then you have life. If you believe the Father sent him, you will be saved.” But sin also gets in the way, causing you to lose doubt. People often times trust in their sin, as shocking as that sounds. The sin becomes their god. Look, therefore, to the witnesses that show you the true God.

If Jesus is who he says he is, then he commands your allegiance, your obedience, your faith, your worship, and your heart. Let nothing stand in the way of getting to him. Examine everything. Look at what they point you towards. And seek to know God on a deeper level. Come to the witnesses and let them show you that Jesus is who he says that he is. Believe upon the son of man and repents of your sins. Then you will know peace from within.