

Jesus Defends His Deity (John 5:31-47)

Jesus is God. He displayed His deity by healing a disabled man by the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. He declared His deity to those who questioned His act of healing on the Sabbath. Jesus then went on to defend His deity, identifying valid witnesses who supported His claims. John 5:31-47 shows us that we have more than sufficient reason to believe that Jesus is God.

We can trust Jesus because He speaks with the authority of God (5:31-32).

While His words carried inherent authority, Jesus didn't ask His audience to simply take Him at His word. He pinned His claims to deity on His relationship with God the Father. Jesus' words carried divine authority. Therefore, we can trust Him.

Jesus acknowledged that His testimony about Himself was legally invalid (5:31).

Jesus knew that, legally speaking, His self-testimony was inadmissible. He said that even though He Himself testified to His deity, His testimony was not "true" in the sense of "valid." Jesus knew that Deuteronomy 19:15 insists that at least two or three witnesses testify in matters of importance before a case can be legally binding. In John 8:13-14 Jesus did affirm the truthfulness of His personal statements, but such statements in the legal sense were insufficient to support His claims.

Jesus based His testimony on His divine relationship with God the Father (5:32).

Jesus' accusers didn't need to rely on His testimony alone. Jesus claimed "another" who witnessed about Him, and Jesus affirmed that the witness of this other one was true. By "another" Jesus may have been referring to John the Baptist, whom He mentions in the next verse. However, the witness of this other one was ongoing—He uses the present tense verb "witness" in verse 32 in contrast to the past tense in reference to John the Baptist in verse 33. It seems preferable to understand this other witness in verse 32 to be God the Father. Jesus never spoke on His own—He spoke only in harmony with the Father. In other words, Jesus spoke with the authority of God. His claims to deity were not merely His own claims, but those of His ultimate witness, God the Father.

We can trust Jesus because He has the supporting testimony of powerful witnesses (5:33-40).

Jesus now marshals His witnesses, as if parading testimony after testimony before the court that was sitting in judgment of His claims. He presents four witnesses, proving that He is God in the flesh and worthy of our faith.

Jesus identified John the Baptist as a trustworthy witness to His divine claims (5:33-35).

John the Baptist was the official, prophetic forerunner of Jesus. John called the Jews to repentance and proclaimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah (John 1:7-8). Jesus reminded the religious leaders that they had sent a delegation to John to enquire about John's message (see John 1:19-34). John freely testified at that time that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God. John was a trustworthy witness. Jesus didn't really need human attestation to His claims, as He told the Jewish leaders. But He willingly pointed to the testimony of John the Baptist so that these religious leaders might be saved. Jesus then described John as a burning and shining lamp. The people were willing to enjoy John's light for a brief period of time, but John's message quickly earned him opposition from the religious and political leaders. John was arrested and eventually executed.

Jesus identified His miraculous works as a valid witness to His divine claims (5:36).

For His second witness, Jesus pointed to His miraculous works. These works served as an even greater testimony to His deity than John's trustworthy witness. Jesus stated that His miraculous works were a gift from God the Father. Jesus indicated that He must finish these works, works that testified about Him. Jesus insisted that His miraculous works should prove to the religious leaders that He had been sent by the Father. Those who saw Jesus perform miracles should have readily recognized His divine nature and purpose. Only stubborn hearts would reject such obvious testimony.

Jesus identified God the Father as the supreme witness to His divine claims (5:37-38).

Jesus' supreme witness to His deity came from the Father Himself. God the Father had sent Jesus and had testified to Jesus' divine relationship. At Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and had heard the Father's voice from heaven declare that Jesus was His own Son (John 1:32-34; compare Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). However, the religious leaders had not heard the Father's voice nor seen the descent of the Holy Spirit (or at least didn't recognize these audible and visible witnesses). In fact, Jesus says that the religious leaders had never really heard God's voice or seen His form. Furthermore, God's Word didn't "abide" in them. Although they claimed to know God's Word, they didn't have a relational knowledge of God. If they truly knew God and God's Word, they would have received the one God had sent, Jesus Christ.

Jesus identified the written Scriptures as a life-giving witness to His divine claims (5:39-40).

Jesus' final witness was the Word of God itself, the written Scriptures. He indicated that the religious leaders had searched the Scriptures (the verb form could be taken as a command to search the Scriptures, but more likely refers to their ongoing practice). They thought that their immersion in the written Word of God would guarantee them eternal life. Yet they failed to see that these very Scriptures pointed to Jesus. The Old Testament witnessed about the Messiah, Jesus. The religious leaders simply didn't want to go to Jesus to receive life. In the stubbornness of their hearts they rejected Jesus, the one to whom the Scriptures testified. Legally, Jesus needed two or three witnesses to support His claim to deity. He presented four—John the Baptist, His miraculous works, God the Father, and the written Scriptures. These powerful witnesses present a compelling case for us to fully trust Jesus.

**We can trust Jesus because He boldly
confronts false belief systems (5:41-47).**

Jesus didn't hesitate to point out the errors in the thought processes of His opponents. He confronted their false beliefs, thereby defending His divine claims.

Jesus accused the religious leaders of being void of love for God (5:41-42).

Jesus didn't base His ministry on people's praise—literally He said that He didn't receive glory from people. By implication, the religious leaders were more interested in the praise of their peers than the truth of God. Jesus stated that He knew these religious leaders. Jesus knew their hearts (compare John 2:24). He knew that they did not have within them "the love of God," that is, they did not love God even though God loved them. God loves us even in our sinfulness. He loves us even when we don't love Him.

Jesus accused the religious leaders of being spiritually undiscerning (5:43-44).

Jesus came into this world in the Father's name, that is, with the character and authority of God the Father. The religious leaders refused to receive Jesus. Yet, these same religious leaders would eagerly receive others who would come in their own name. They were more impressed with human achievements than divine endorsement. Because they were eager to receive glory from one another rather than from the only true God, they could not believe in Jesus. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were spiritually undiscerning. They rejected Jesus, who came from the Father, but would receive others who came from no base of authority other than their own. Some of the future rebellions against Roman rule would prove Jesus' statement

to be true. The Jews would, to their destruction, rally behind would-be messiahs who had no divine authority.

Jesus accused the religious leaders of rejecting the writings of their hero Moses (5:45-47).

Jesus now brought Moses into the picture. He said that He did not need to accuse the religious leaders, presenting their faults to God the Father. Moses had already done that! The religious leaders had placed their hope in Moses. They believed that by studying the Mosaic Law and living according to their narrow interpretation of that Law they would have eternal life. However, had these religious leaders really believed Moses they would have believed Jesus too. After all, Moses wrote about the Messiah (compare Deuteronomy 18:15). Therefore, since the religious leaders didn't really believe "the letters" (the writings of Moses, the Torah), they would never believe the words of Jesus. His claims will fall on deaf ears because of their hardened hearts. Jesus wasn't afraid to confront the false beliefs of His opponents. He stood for truth. He claimed to be God in the flesh. He marshaled powerful witnesses to testify to this truth. Only spiritual stubbornness would prevent the religious leaders of His day from believing in Him. Spiritual stubbornness continues to keep people from Jesus in spite of the fact that we have more than sufficient reason to believe that Jesus is God.