

**“The Only Witness to the Deity of Christ”**  
**John 5:31-47**

“If it pleases God, you will hear the Gospel in this message.

The Gospel will either gather the elect into the church or drive away the wolves from the sheepfold.” [William Perkins]

In John Chapter 5, after Jesus heals the man who had an infirmity for 38 years, the Jewish leaders attacked him because they said that He had broken the Sabbath by healing the man and telling the man to carry his bed. In other words Jesus had caused the man to do “work” on the Sabbath.

The irony of their accusation was not lost on the man who was healed because he reasoned correctly that anyone who could heal him must be obeyed, Sabbath or not. Jesus is the Lord also of the Sabbath! [Matthew 12:8]

When the Jews learn that it was **Jesus** who had healed the man they wanted to kill Him. But if commanding the man to do “work” on the Sabbath was not enough to accuse Jesus in the minds of the Jewish leaders, the answer that Jesus gave to the Jews caused them to become even more **outraged** towards Him!

What did Jesus say to them that so increased their hatred of Him?

Only this, **“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”**

When Jesus called God His Father, the Jews understood that Jesus claimed to be equal with God!

Then Jesus preaches the most amazing sermon on His deity! [17-47]

There is a small book that, if I had the power, I would require every man that presumes to preach, to read. If you are a preacher, please read this book. The book is The Art of Prophesying, by William Perkins. The Banner of Truth Trust, ISBN 0 85151 689 0.

The Art of Prophesying, by William Perkins, a Puritan from over 400 years ago. This impressed me as being exactly what we learn from the Gospel of John about Jesus of Nazareth.

“The sum and substance of the message of the Bible can be summarized in an argument [or syllogism] such as this:

*Major Premise:* The true Messiah shall be both God and man, from the seed of David. He shall be born of His heavenly Father’s bosom. He shall satisfy the law. He shall offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the faithful. He shall conquer death by dying and rising again. He shall ascend into heaven. In due time He shall return for judgment.

*Minor Premise:* Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, meets all of these requirements.

*Conclusion:* Therefore Jesus is the true Messiah.

In this syllogism, the major premise is the scope or principle burden of the writings of all the prophets. The minor premise is contained in the writings of the evangelists and apostles.”

Jesus makes wonderful [full of wonder] claims that can only be true of One who is Himself God. We so abuse our language. The ad people tell us that a soft drink is “wonderful.” I do not stand in awe of a can of soda. But the claims that Jesus makes for Himself fill me with wonder.

Now in vss. 31-47, Jesus calls on a Witness.

Since the Jews refuse to believe Jesus Himself, what other evidence is there that He is Immanuel, God with us?

**Isaiah 7:14**

**Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**

**Matthew 1:22-23**

**22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."**

Most of the commentaries find four or five witnesses to His deity, viz.

- The witness of Himself [5:31]
- The witness of John the Baptist [5:33-35]
- The witness of His works [5:36]
- The witness of the Father [5:37-38]
- And the witness of the OT Scripture [5:39-47]

However, the context of this passage is the **unity** of the Son with the Father [Cf. 19, 31].

Charles Alexander, to whom I owe much of this exposition, says, “Statements such as these, never before uttered by the lips of men, are now appropriately authenticated by evidence – such evidence as the **Father only** could bear of the Only Begotten Son.”

And so, these “witnesses” are not so much four or five separate witnesses but rather a **unity** of the witness of the Father who loves the Son.

Therefore, Christ is speaking of only **one Witness** to His deity and of His office and that is the Father. Cf. 32, He does not say “There are others who bear witness of Me,” but “There is another...”

Before we get too deep into the exposition we should read the text.

### **John 5:31-47**

*31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. 33 You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.*

*36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish — the very works that I do — bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.*

*37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. 38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.*

*39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

*41 "I do not receive honor from men. 42 But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44 How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"*

*"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.*

How could anything that Jesus says not be the truth?

Jesus uses a figure of speech, the same way we say things.  
Let me give you an example.

If I were to say to you that our current president is the best president this country had ever had, you would know, that coming from me, it would not be true.

I.e., In your opinion; what I said would not be true!

So when Jesus says, *31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true"*.

This is as though He were to say, "If I testify concerning Myself, He means, **in your opinion**, I would not be telling the truth."

And that is exactly what the Pharisees said, Cf. John 8:12-13

**12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

**13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."**

*32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.*

The One described as "Another" is none other than God the Father.

But that raises a question about verse 37.

*You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.*

The Father does bear witness to the Son in the OT, but you have never heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. How can verse 32 and verse 37 both be true?

Hold that puzzle until we get to verse 37 and we will see how verse 32 and verse 37 can both be true.

In verse 33 Jesus does mention the witness of John the Baptist, but it is only to **exclude** it from consideration as verse 34 tells us. Jesus does not need the testimony of man. Cf. John 2:24-25.

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

*34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.*

John the Baptist was sent to the nation of Israel to announce that the Christ was walking among them. Jesus of Nazareth is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

That announcement by John was a stabbing double-edged sword of truth into the wicked hearts of the Jews who were rejecting Jesus.

**One side** of this double-edged “sword” is that the Christ is the Savior of Gentiles as well as Jews, which is exactly what “the world” means.

The Jews excluded everyone but the Jews from Messiah.

Some preachers have gone to the other extreme and say that the “world” means everyone. But if Jesus takes away the sin of the entire human race then nothing that the Bible teaches about hell can be true!

The **other side** of this double-edged “sword”, which most scholars seem to miss, is that the New Covenant is replacing the Old Covenant and the Old Testament sacrificial system is abolished **forever**.

The worship at the temple [Cf. 4:21], the animal sacrifices, the washings are all going away. If anything, this was more difficult for the Jews to accept than that Messiah is also the Savior of Gentiles!

The Old Covenant was “nailed to the cross” [Colossians 2:14] and it is simply unscriptural to yearn for a future Jewish kingdom and a renewal of animal sacrifices in a third temple in Jerusalem.

As to John the Baptist, the Jewish leaders have all but forgotten the favorable reception they gave to John at first. Jesus gives John a stirring endorsement; but Jesus does not need the testimony on man.

*34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.*

The people must look for a greater witness than John. God sent John and his witness was true but they soon rejected John’s message.

*“... but I say these things that you may be saved.”*

God has a revealed will and we have it in the word of God.  
God also has a secret will, which he has not revealed to man.

God’s revealed will is that we do not steal, but men steal.  
God’s revealed will is that we do not lie, but men tell lies.  
God’s revealed will is that we do not commit adultery, but men do.

God’s revealed will is that God wants all men to repent and believe the Gospel, but God has not **decreed** that all men will be saved.

The decrees of God are certain to come to pass!  
God has decreed to call His elect from all eternity. God does have a people and they will come to faith in Christ. But that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Faith comes with the preaching of the Gospel and the Gospel is to be preached to every creature.

“As much as we believe the doctrine of reprobation it is important that preachers do what the Lord Himself did. We must employ the **means** of salvation, which is the Gospel, and leave to divine wisdom and sovereignty, the mystery of election and effectual calling. It is a serious thing for anyone to claim knowledge of the unknowable.” [Charles Alexander]

That is the sense of “... *but I say these things that you may be saved.*”

Had they believed John they could have been saved.

We must urge everyone to repent and believe the Gospel and we must do this in a way that honors Christ, and does not rob God of His sovereignty!

Do not assign to man what only God can do! It is blasphemy to say that God “wants” to do something but must get man’s permission!

So to a crowd of **unbelievers**, Christ proclaimed,  
“... *but I say these things that you may be saved.*”  
And let us do no less!

**This sermon by Jesus is an evangelical sermon!**

*36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish — the very works that I do — bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.*

Jesus proceeds to describe the nature of the Father’s witness to the Son. The **works** the Father gave Him to do bear witness that the Father had sent Him.

The **works** are the miracles that Jesus did, one of the most notable of which was the cause of the present dialog with the Jews. i.e. healing the impotent man.

Deliverance from bodily infirmity was but the outward sign of Christ’s power to heal the soul and bring in the Kingdom of God.

Christ is not only speaking to that generation of Jews, but all succeeding ages of history. He is declaring His sovereign rule and His omnipotence in the deliverance of the church, the calling of the Gentiles, the binding of Satan and the final assize of all creation at the bar of His judgment.

*37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.*

*38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.*

These two verses tell the history of the Jews. The Jews do not have the word of God abiding in them. It was a matter of national pride that the Jews boasted of the oracles of God having been committed to them.

The Apostle Paul, in Romans 3, says that this was the great advantage that the Jews had. But Paul goes on to say that the Jews, who had the word of God, did not believe God and were as much under the wrath of God as the Gentiles who had never heard of the true God. Most of the Jews did not believe Paul either.

Jesus is saying that the reason you do not know Me is because you do not have the word of God abiding in you and in that sense you have never heard His voice nor seen His form at any time.

But the Father has borne witness to the Son in the OT! [32]

What might the Jews have heard and seen?

They might have heard and seen Christ!

All of the appearances of God in the OT in shape and sound were not appearances of God the Father, but of God the Son as the “Angel of the Lord.” There are no less than 118 references in the OT to the “Angel of the Lord.” “Angel” means “messenger” or the “one who is sent.”

What the OT people heard and saw was Christ. Never at any time in the OT did the Father Himself speak or appear. It was always the LOGOS, the Revealer of God. Jesus is the One Isaiah saw “high and lifted up” [Isaiah 6] as John tells us in 12:41.

The One Jacob wrestled with at Peniel was Christ. [Genesis 32:30; Cf. Hosea 12:4]



It is Christ that the Jews rejected in the OT as they continued to do with Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ!

*38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.*

The nation of the Jews was on trial for its life and the indictment of the Jews by Jesus continues.

*39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

### **You are not willing!**

It is not the want of a divine decree that keeps a sinner from everlasting life, but the continued rejection of light and truth by the soul committed to the love of sin.

Hengstenberg's comments on the rejection of the Jews because of their unbelief are about the best that I have read.

“When therefore the Jews do not accept the testimony of the Father to the Son, when they reject Christ, they thus dissolve all connections with God and become ‘without God in the world’ no less than the heathen. Never having stood in immediate relation to God the Father, they now wantonly destroy the medium of connection with Him, and there is nothing therefore left to them but darkness, deception, and death, in which we see them buried even to the present day. Moreover, by the rejection of Christ they have not God’s word abiding in them; for Christ alone is the true and essential Word of God.”

There is perhaps no more appropriate a Scripture than Psalm 2:12.

**Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish in the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.**

When a man rejects the Son that man has severed all hope of mercy!

One thing that the Jews believed was that the Scriptures was the final authority. That settled all disputes. Their problem was that they did not follow their own principles.

E.g., it was the Pharisees that said, “No prophet has arisen from Galilee.”

But Jonah was from Galilee and it was Jonah whom Jesus calls on as the only sign that would be given as to His authority.

*41 "I do not receive honor from men.*

*42 But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.*

To quote Hengstenberg again:

“Jesus turns aside the reproach of ambition which the Jews might and indeed must, have brought against Him on the ground of the words *'But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.'* The honor conferred by men can be of no consequence to the Son of God. He has the honor of the Only Begotten of the Father and is therefore raised above all other honor. He then brings against them the counter accusation that they *do not have the love of God in you* and therefore do not have that which is laid down in their law as the foundation of all life and salvation. They manifest this want of love to God in that they love not Him whom He has sent.”

### **Jesus is teaching about True and False Religion:**

*43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.*

The Jews were reproved and warned. Their lack of love of God was revealed in their hatred of Him who came in the name of the Father.

This is yet another claim by Jesus which no mere man can make. He says that if you do not love Him you do not love the Father. To come in the Father's name is to claim that He is of one in substance with the Father.

**This is true religion!**

Every false religion from “the way of Cain” to the perverted religion of the terrorists in our time is a religion of hate. The religion of Satan is built on lies, murder, and hate!

Jude warns of “the way of Cain”. Cain was instructed as to how to worship God. But Cain offered the product of his own hands. Abel offered a blood sacrifice. God respected Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s offering. Cain could not kill God so he killed his brother Abel. That is the “the way of Cain” to attempt to worship God in your own way and not in the way that God has prescribed in His word.

Every religious opportunist that comes in his own name will find a ready following because invariably error makes no real demand for moral correction. Satan is too shrewd to attempt to make disciples by valid moral demands for repentance.

The **false religion** of the Pharisees was self-centered to the utmost degree.

The first pronouncement of the Gospel was “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

Hengstenberg says, “Salvation without repentance was, even under the Old Covenant, the watchword of the prophets who prophesied out of their own heart.”

“The history of corrupt Christianity is replete with wretched examples of men who would raise themselves to positions of power, ecclesiastical or otherwise, by inventing religions which might have many exciting novelties, promises of earthly prosperity, or fleshly indulgence, but the tree is known by its fruit. Evangelical repentance; devotion to Christ and to His honor and name alone, are unmistakable signs of grace.” [Charles Alexander]

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

Here is the chief cause of unbelief – the desire to appear well among one’s fellow man rather than to seek divine approval. Salvation certainly does not proceed from the merit of any such seeking for God, but it is a sure token of repentance when the soul looks to God rather than to man and values His smile more than all that the world can offer.

The “only God” derives from Deuteronomy 6:4.

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!**

“The unity of God designates His absoluteness. There are no other gods beside Him. If there is but one God, there is but One to be feared in heaven and in earth, and but one God to love.” [Hengstenberg]

*45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"*

Moses wrote of Christ, and not only in the occasional prophecies which in the Mosaic books foretell directly of the coming of Christ, but as the one theme of all he ever wrote, or to put it in Bengel’s terse and telling phrase -

**NOWHERE DID MOSES NOT WRITE OF CHRIST!**

Anyone who tries to make Moses oppose Christ is simply ignorant of what Moses wrote, “*for he wrote about Me.*” Says Jesus.

We are to look for Christ in the OT Scriptures as the subject matter of the whole. Creation was His work and was for Him.

Hebrews 2, which quotes Psalm 8, reads:

**Hebrews 2:5-9**

**For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying:**

**"What is man that You are mindful of him,  
Or the son of man that You take care of him?  
7 You have made him a little lower than the angels;  
You have crowned him with glory and honor,  
And set him over the works of Your hands.  
8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet."**

**For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.**

Every part of Scripture in both the OT and in the NT points us to Jesus Christ.

I will close this exposition of Christ's sermon on His deity by quoting two men who preached on "Moses Wrote of Me."

"There is probably a depth of meaning in the Pentateuch that has never yet been fully fathomed. We shall probably find at the last day that Christ was in many a chapter and many a verse and yet we knew it not. There is a fullness in Scripture far beyond our conception." [Bishop J. C. Ryle]

"The true Christology of the Old Testament is not to be sought merely in some isolated passages, but as the pervading element of the whole book; those passages that have been selected as Messianic are but the culminating points of the rock whose foundations lie deep in the ocean of Old Testament scriptures. Herein is their infinite importance and solemnity that they speak of Him with whom we have to do, or rather, He with whom we have to do speaks to us in them." [Dr. John Duncan]

"The amazing fullness of our Lord's teaching appears most strikingly in the address contained in this chapter. Within the short span of twenty-nine verses we find no less than eleven mighty subjects brought forward: (1) The intimate relation of the Father and the Son. (2) The divine commission and dignity of the Son. (3) The privileges of the man who believes. (4) The quickening of the spiritually dead. (5) The judgment. (6) The resurrection of the body. (7) The value of miracles. (8) The Scriptures. (9) The corruption of man's will, the secret of man's ruin. (10) The love of man's praise, the cause of unbelief. (11) The importance of the writings of Moses." [J.C. Ryle]

In the spirit of this message and with some increased awareness of the majesty of Jesus Christ I beg you to consider the value of your soul.

Do not be among the ones that Jesus condemned when He said,

*But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

The Bible never assigns a reason to a man's refusal to come to faith in Christ to anything other than a man's own stubborn refusal to so.

No one will be able to stand in the Day of Judgment and say to Christ, I would have come to faith in You, but I knew that I was not one of Your elect!

Do you desire to come to Christ more than anything else?

But wait! Have you counted the cost? Do you want to trust Christ more than to have the approval of your friends who live without Him?

Will you forsake all known sin?

That is what it means to repent.  
To repent means to turn away from sin and toward God.

So can you **now** come to Christ?

If you can trust Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit has “Made you willing in the day of His power.”

What does Jesus’ sermon on His deity teach?

That Jesus is very God and that He has all authority to redeem you or to pass you by! “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior”.

What does His sermon mean to you?

It means that if you refuse to repent and come to Jesus Christ in simple faith that you will die in your sins and go to hell!

What then are you to do? What does the Scripture teach us to do?

Repent and commit you soul to Jesus and show that by confessing Him before men. Profess your faith before friends and family.

The invitation is to repent and believe the Gospel.

If you have never made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, or if you have not received believer’s baptism, you need to see one of our elders who will discuss with you the way of righteousness.

Jim Gunn  
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