

# John 5:31-47

John 5:31-47 continues where we left off last week. No new miracles are done, no action takes place. What we have here is Jesus' testimony about Jesus. When we think of the events of the Gospel of John, we don't usually think about this passage or the passage we studied last week. Instead our thoughts turn towards things like Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan Woman, the various healings, the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on water, and the Passion Narrative. For many people, John 5:16-47 is nothing more than a bridge to get from one miracle to another. However, last week's lesson, combined with this week's text, serves an important purpose: it tells us by what authority Jesus does all of His miracles and it explains Jesus' relationship to God the Father.

**The following comments by Culpepper in his book *The Gospel and Letters of John* serves as an introduction and overview of the text.**

"John 5 is composed of three units: the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18), Jesus' discourse on the authority of the Son (5:1-30), and a discourse on the witness to Jesus (5:31-47)" (R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 149).

"The whole discourse, therefore, takes on the atmosphere of a trial scene in which accuser bring charges, the accused is asked to respond, and then witnesses are summoned" (*ibid*, 152-3).

**The following is taken from Craig R. Koester's *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, pages 91-94, and serves as an outline of this very difficult text!**

In His speech from 5:17-47, Jesus is following "conventional Greco-Roman rhetoric."

- He first identifies the "crux" of the matter, or the issue that was to be debated (5:16-17).
  - He healed on the Sabbath because God, His Father, also worked on the Sabbath.
- Next, Jesus "develops arguments from accepted premises."
  - The accepted premise Jesus used is:
    - God worked on the Sabbath by creating. ("God never ceases making, but as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to

chill, so it is the property of God to make.” – Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*.

- The argument Jesus develops is:
  - He can do the work the Father does.
  - The Father-Son relationship here works well in Jesus’ culture, where a son would normally adopt the trade, craft, or skill of his father. (And since Jesus has been with His Father “in the beginning,” He is ready to do His work.)
  - Therefore, the “son does ‘what he sees his father doing,’ and in time the father would entrust his son with certain responsibilities, which a faithful son would carry out.”
  - God the Father’s trade: giving life and judging.
- Next, Jesus “introduces witnesses to support” His claims.
  - “Jesus produces two witnesses, as was customary under Jewish law (Deuteronomy 19:15) and in common Greco-Roman practice (Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.3, 6).
  - One “witness” for Jesus is the works themselves; He is doing something that only God can do. (5:36)
  - Another “witness” for Jesus is the Scriptures. (5:37-40) Although unquoted, Deuteronomy 18:18-19 seems to speak to what Jesus is talking about.
  - Jesus needs to get the testimony of the Father on His side.
- Lastly, Jesus discredits His opponents. (5:41-47)
  - “Jesus charges that his opponents seek glory from other human beings but reject the glory that comes from God.
  - By the time Jesus is through, the accusers have become the defendants, the accused the accuser. “They are charged with rejecting the testimony of Moses by rejecting the one whom God has sent.”
- The work Jesus does “bears witness to his unity with the Father.”

## Questions:

Jesus is God. John has made this clear from the beginning of his Gospel. So why does Jesus say in 5:31 that His testimony alone is not valid?

In 5:33, Jesus says that the testimony of John the Baptist is true. What was that testimony?

What does it mean that the Jews (the group Jesus addresses from 5:19 onward) have never seen heard the voice of God, seen His form, or have His word dwell in them? (5:37-38)

It has been said that if you cut the Scriptures anywhere, they will bleed Christ. Jesus confirms this in 5:39. Many people today are reading the Bible, but not all see Christ as the subject of the Bible. Who are some of these people, and what can we do about it?

Jesus points out the illogical behavior of the Jews (5:40-42): not accepting Jesus when He comes in His Father's name, but accepting people who come in their own name. What he means is that the Jews accepted other people as authorities in spiritual matters (such as the Rabbis and as is recorded in the Mishnah) but ignored the Word of God, Jesus Christ. What are some examples of people doing this today: relying on the opinions of people instead of the Word of God? What are the dangers of doing this?

Jesus tells the Jews that their understanding of the Law of Moses is flawed. Instead of having a more sophisticated and wise view of the Law of Moses than the "common" people, the Jews end up having a misguided and spiritually dangerous view of the Law. It's not that they have intellectualized something that should be child-like in understanding; they have veered off course and have built up momentum in moving in a dangerous direction.