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The Scriptures Bear Witness: A Biblical Exegesis of John 5:30-47

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Introduction

The very core and foundation of the Christian faith begins with the presupposition that God's Word is absolutely inspired and without error. Nevertheless, it is nothing new for the Scriptures to come under criticism and attack living in a post-Christian culture. In fact, in this modern era (21st century), the Scriptures face the constant barrage of attacks such as the unbelief in its inerrancy, infallibility, and authority. The common-unbelieving phrase is usually stated along these lines, "Sinful man wrote the Bible so it must have error in it somewhere." To say such a statement as this is to fall into a grave category of unbelief and will result in judgment (cf. Jn.5:47; 12:44-50). On the other hand, to believe in Jesus' words and Him who sent the Son has eternal life (Jn. 5:24). Indeed, 2 Tim. 3:16 claims the entirety of Scripture was brought forth from God Himself. Faith, eternity, peace, life, and heaven are at one end and unbelief, judgment, condemnation, death, and hell at the other end. Simply put, depending in what one believes about the Scriptures is a matter of Heaven or Hell. This point cannot be overemphasized.

With that in mind, John (one of the closest disciples to Jesus) stresses the eye-witness account of Jesus' perspective on Scripture in his Gospel: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (Jn. 5:39). One can find the entirety of this account in John 5:30-47 which by some theologians rightly title this passage as the: "Witnesses' to Jesus,"¹ "Jesus Goes to Trial,"² "The Four Witnesses to Christ,"³ and "Jesus' Divinity Sermon,"⁴ to name a few. Still, by conducting a biblical exegesis on John 5:30-47 one can be certain that Jesus declared Scripture's inerrancy, infallibility, and its ultimate authority.

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

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible: John Study Notes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001), 2032.

² Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 176.

³ Elmer Towns, *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series: The Gospel of John Believe and Live* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 53.

⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012).

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, ⁴⁰ 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?"⁵

Background and Context

Without doubt, the Gospel of John is significant in its purpose by describing the person and work of Christ in such a way as to convince his readers just in fact who Jesus was... the Son of God! In fact, Dr. Hindson puts it like this: "John's Gospel is different by nature from the other three. It is an interpretation of the facts of Jesus' life with an emphasis on His deity."⁶ Dr. Hindson also describes the four Gospels much like four portraits of Jesus each emphasizing Jesus in a specific manner and John's portrait is "Christ the Son of God."⁷ It is in this passage, the doctrines of Christology (Jesus' Deity) and Bibliology (Scripture as Divine Revelation), are showcased in the most spectacular manner. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of Christology only enhances the significance on Jesus' words in this passage.

⁵ *The English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001). [All Scripture is used from the ESV unless otherwise noted]

⁶ Edward Hindson, *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series: The Gospel of Matthew* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 2-3.

⁷ Ibid.

Eternal Purpose

Despite the fact John's main point is that Jesus is the Son of God, for the sake of time, length, and brevity the main purpose of this paper will be to investigate Jesus' perspective on Scripture. In addition, this paper will not perform an entire exegesis on John 5, although the chapter as a whole is significant and helpful to understanding Jesus' case. However, when Jesus moves from a defensive position to an offensive prosecution in this "trial," He uses key words that illustrate precisely what His perspective on Scripture is. Therefore, by performing a biblical exegesis on John 5:30-47 with a focus on the words *graphē* (Scripture) and *marturēō* (bear witness), by defining them in its: immediate passage, book, Scriptural (New Testament), canonical, historical, and theological context, one will have sufficient enough context to come to a proper interpretation of Jesus' perspective on Scripture, namely its inerrancy and authority. Equally important, this will help one apply these pertinent biblical truths to everyday life. So, the objective of this paper is to precisely find out what Jesus meant when he said, "it is they (*the Scriptures*) that bear witness about me" (5:39), and to find out what is His perspective on Scripture is.

Graphē and its Immediate Context

First, by defining the word *graphē* (G1124) *γραφή* (Greek for Scripture used by Jesus in John 5:39), will provide an invaluable resource to understand the full weight and implications of the case Jesus is making. According to Fredrick Danker:

γραφή, [γράψω] in the NT only in reference to the scriptures of Israel, namely the OT, *scripture*—a. as an individual citation Mk 12:10; Lk4:21; J13:18; Ac 1:16; Ro 11:2; 1 Ti 5:18; 2 Ti 3:16; Js 2:8; --b. as a body of writings Mt 21:42; Mk 12:24; Lk 24:27; J 5:39; Ac 17:2, 11; Ro 1:2; 15:4; 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 3:8; 2 Pt 3:16.⁸

As noted, the interpretation and definition and usage of this word refers to a "body of writings" in which the reference in this context in John 5:39 is referring to the Old Testament as a whole. Furthermore, a similar usage is recorded by Luke when Jesus said, "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the

⁸ Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 82.

Scriptures (Luke24:44-45).” It is no coincidence that Jesus directly after making the comment that He must fulfill the *writings* such as the Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms (speaking of the OT as a whole), states that He *opened* their minds to the *graphē* (γραφή).⁹ In short, Jesus was communicating an imperative truth, that He was the key to unlocking the meaning of the Old Testament writings! Likewise, John’s usage of γραφή is congruent with Luke’s usage. Strong’s definition of *graphē* renders the following:

γραφή {51} *graphē, graf-ay’*; from 1125; *a document, i.e. holy Writ* (or its contents or a statement in it): - scripture {51}. *Graphē as a verb means “to write”* [Eng., “graph,” “graphic,” etc.], primarily denotes “a drawing, painting”; then “a writing,” **(1)** of the OT Scriptures, **(1a)** in the plural, **(1b1)** the whole, e.g. Mt 21:42; 22:29; Jn 5:39; Acts 17:11; 18:24. **(1a2)** Rom 1:2 where “the prophets” comprises the OT writers in general; 15:4; **(1a3)** Rom 16:26, lit., “prophetic writings,” expressing the character of all the Scriptures.¹⁰

In the aforementioned examples of γραφή, its definition and usage in both Luke’s gospel and John’s, gives the reader great clarity. It is undeniably obvious in both contexts, both John and Luke describe γραφή in direct reference to Jesus using the Old Testament as a whole, which *bears witness* to who He is. At the same time, the NT had not been written. Thus, when Jesus is speaking of the Scriptures in this context, He is referring to the *well-establish, circulated, authoritative, and canonical* Old Testament. Thomas Nelson adds this point:

5:39 Scripture: (Gr. *graphē*) (Matt. 26:56; Luke 24:27; Acts 17:2; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16) G1124: This is the word from which we get words like “biography” and “autograph.” It refers to written words or documents, and specifically in Scripture often refers to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The word makes reference to God, the divine Author, and how His written words are His living voice. Probably the most famous definition of this word is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.¹¹

However, in this example even, the famous 2 Timothy 3:16-17 usage of γραφή is of particular interest of many theologians and pastors alike. Likewise,

⁹ James Strong and John R. Kohlenberger, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2010), 61-62.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Thomas Nelson, *KJV Word Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2017), 1218.

Timothy Swinson has done an extensive research on the word *γραφῆ* who focuses on its exact usage in Paul's letters to Timothy, to illustrate that the word can even be used to describe certain NT scriptures (that were considered authoritative at the time), including the OT as a whole.¹² In these specific examples, Swinson's interpretation of 2 Tim. 3:16-17 *γραφῆ* and its use by Luke and John, are all referring to the OT as a whole. Nevertheless, it is possible that *γραφῆ* can also be used, "in the singular in reference to a particular passage."¹³ However, John never quotes Jesus using this to refer to a particular passage or specific Scripture (ref. John 5:39) for this to be the case. In fact, at the very least, Jesus refers to all the writings of Moses (vv. 45-47) with him mentioned as a *witness* at the end of His trial in its immediate context. Even so, this is not the case. The use of *γραφῆ* in John 5:39 is used in the plural sense as well as "Moses' writings" is also used in the plural (5:47). Therefore, the word agreement and overall structure of the passage makes sense to interpret the use of *γραφῆ* as the Old Testament as a whole. This is significant because John's usage of *γραφῆ* is central to Jesus' witness and testimony of who He is, the Son of God! Indeed, this is central to John's message and climax he is arriving at in John 5. Especially in the beginning of John 5 John is making a case for Jesus' deity. Of course, the Jews understand that the OT as a whole is all about God. So, when Jesus declares that the *γραφῆ* testifies to who He is (Jn. 5:39), they understood that this is a direct claim to be divine.

***Graphē* in the Gospel of John**

When investigating *γραφῆ* in its usage in John's Gospel one will find that there is a contrast in the way John uses *γραφῆ* in 5:39 than in other instances. For example, John records later in his Gospel account: "For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again, another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced" (19:36-37). Mainly, when John uses a particular passage, he makes a reference to that individual passage and also uses *γραφῆ* in the singular form such as the previously stated example (Jn. 19:36-37). In addition, theologian Emery Bancroft also acknowledges the usage of *Scriptures* (Jn. 5:39) as differed from the singular usage of *Scripture* by John (e.g. Jn. 2:22; 7:38).¹⁴ With these context clues, it becomes much easier to tell when John is referencing a specific passage of Scripture than the whole.

¹² L. Timothy Swinson, *What is Scripture: Paul's Use of Graphe in the Letter to Timothy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf Stock), 17-18.

¹³ Strong and Kohlenberger, 61-62.

¹⁴ Emery H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 14.

Furthermore, James Strong also delineates John's usage of *γραφῆ* in the singular in multiple different instances (e.g. Jn. 2:22; 10:35; 19:24, 28, 36, 37, 20:9).¹⁵ John describes that Scripture, "must/may/might/would be fulfilled" (Jn. 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36; CSB). With that said, John sees and speaks about the Scripture as a divine revelation that will ultimately be fulfilled. Moreover, the rest of the New Testament writers are harmonious with John's view of Scripture, seeing that all *γραφῆ* will one day be fulfilled and are truly authoritative. To the New Testament writers, "it is not a matter of *if* but *when*."

***Graphē* in the New Testament**

Graphē is used several times and located all throughout the New Testament. In fact, "the term is used some 50 times in the NT for some or all of the OT."¹⁶ One of the more notable instances happens to be in the very first book of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, *γραφῆ* is used when Jesus powerfully answers the Sadducees and states, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29). Similarly, John's usage in 5:39 parallels Matthew's usage by describing Jesus referring to the Old Testament as a whole.¹⁷ Moreover, W. E. Vine concludes:

The Scriptures are frequently personified by the NT writers (as by the Jews, John 7:42), (a) as speaking with divine authority, e.g. John 19:37; Rom. 4:3; 9:17, where the Scripture is said to speak to Pharaoh, giving the message actually sent previously by God to him through Moses; Jas. 4:5(see above); (b) as possessed of the sentient quality of foresight, and the active power of preaching, Gal. 3:8, where the Scripture mentioned was written more than four centuries after the words were spoken. The Scripture, in such a case, stands for its divine Author with an intimation that it remains perpetually characterized as the living voice of God.¹⁸

With this said, not only do the New Testament authors declare Scriptures authority by stating its fulfillment in the person and work of Christ, but also in its personified usage of being alive and active (cf. Jn. 7:42; Heb. 4:12). In fact, in John's usage of

¹⁵ Strong and Kohlenberger, 62.

¹⁶ Chad Brand, Eric Alan Mitchell, Steve Bonds, E. Ray Clendenen, Trent C. Butler, and Bill Latta, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), Scripture.

¹⁷ Strong and Kohlenberger, 62.

¹⁸ W. E. Vine, (William Edwy), *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 2003).

graphē in 5:39, is also fitting in this way due to the fact he uses the word to “bear witness” directly after it in the present tense. Thus, the *γραφή* are a breathing, ongoing, an active witness in Jesus’ defensive. This leads to the next imperative word study of *marturēō* (bear witness).

***Marturēō* and its Immediate Context**

Next, the word *marturēō* (G3140) *μαρτυρέω* (bear witness) may be the most significant word used in John 5:30-47 and central to unpacking Jesus’ perspective on Scripture. James Strong states:

μαρτυρέω *marturēō*, as a verb denotes, **(1)** “to be a martus” (3144), or “to bear witness to,” sometimes rendered “to testify”; **(1a)** It means to affirm that one has seen or hear or experienced something, or **(1b)** that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration. **(2)** It is used of the witness **(2a)** of God the Father **(2a1)** to Christ: “There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true” (Jn 5:32, cf. vs 37; 8:18; 1 Jn 5:9, 10.¹⁹

In this definition, John is using *marturēō* to denote the act of giving a truthful account and in this case, to the person of Jesus. In addition, it states: “**(5)** of the Scriptures to Christ: ‘Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me’ (John 5:39; cf. Heb. 7:8, 17).”²⁰ To be sure, it would also be wise to investigate what Frederick William Danker states of *marturēō*:

μαρτυρέω [μάρτυς] ‘attest to a fact or truth,’ *testify, attest*—*a.* w. focus on confirmation and attestation, act. Mt 23:3; J 1:7, 34; 3:11; 4:39; 5:39; 10:25; 10:25; 18:23; 21:24; Ac 15:8; 22:5; 23:11; Ro 10:2; 1 Cor 15:15; Gal 4:15; Col 4:13; 1 Ti 6:13; 1 J 1:2; 5:10; 3 J 3; Rv 1:2; 22:16, 20.²¹

In short, *marturēō* defined in this way indicates that John in this passage (5:30-47), renders the direct interpretation of an attestation to a truthful claim, act, or person. In this case, Jesus is claiming that the *γραφή* (OT Scriptures) *μαρτυρέω* (testify) to

¹⁹ Strong and Kohlenberger, 156.

²⁰ Ibid., 157.

²¹ Danker, 222.

who He is. Thus, John is drawing much needed attention to Jesus' divine claims, hence, His words, "of me" (Jn. 5:32, 36, 39, 40, 46). John wants his readers to know full well that Jesus was claiming that He had witnesses, and namely, one of them was the *active* and *breathing* Old Testament itself.

***Marturēō* in the Gospel of John**

Marturēō is used elsewhere by John to record Jesus' words in John 10:25. In this example, Jesus again reemphasizes that it is His works that "bear witness" about who He is, similar to John 5:36. Furthermore, the usage of *μαρτυρέω* followed by Jesus' claim "of me" in John 10:25 mirrors 5:39. This is significant because John is purposely bringing attention once again to Jesus' claims. Indeed, John writes with an emphasis on Jesus' deity, hence, whenever Jesus made a claim, John wants his readers to know all about it. Interestingly enough, John uses the same word to describe his own eye-witness account when he states: "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (Jn. 21:24). In fact, John's usage of *μαρτυρέω* happens to be in his closing remarks in his Gospel, and closes his statement with the word "true!" In sum, *μαρτυρέω* used in conjunction with the claims of Jesus, is a direct example that Jesus was claiming to be divine.

In fact, because Jesus was claiming that *γραφή* were *μαρτυρέω* to who He was, He is making two claims: first, that He is equal to God (divine), and secondly, that the Scriptures are authoritative. John describes the Old Testament bearing witness about Jesus in many distinct ways. For instance, John records Jesus making direct claims to be divine by echoing the name of God in Exodus 3:14, and being the greater fulfillment of the OT Scriptures. John records the great **I AM** statements of Jesus. For example, Jesus states: "I am the bread of life" (6:35). This is a direct correlation to Exodus and of the spring feast the Jews observed.²² The feast of Unleavened Bread is a representation of Jesus who is without sin, differed from the rest of sinful humanity or the *leavened bread* (cf. Lev. 23:6).

Clearly, by Jesus using the Holy name of God in direct context with **bread of life** is no small coincidence. In fact, it is on purpose! Moreover, those who heard Jesus' words would of understood the history and the significance of bread, as it was even a testimony to be kept throughout the Israelites generations (cf. Ex. 16). This is why Scripture states that Jesus' works also *μαρτυρέω* to who He is (Jn. 5:36). In this case, it is Jesus' sinless character and complete obedience to the Father who

²² Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004), 107.

bears witness to who He is. The Scriptures *μαρτυρέω* to who Jesus is by Jesus being the fulfillment of the *γραφή*.

***Marturēō* in the New Testament**

Marturēō used elsewhere in the New Testament will also bring clarity and significance to its usage in John 5:39 and Jesus' perspective on Scripture. For example, in the book of Hebrews it is used in such a manner to describe that the Scriptures testify to Christ much similar as John 5:39. For example, Scripture states: "In the one case, men who will die receive a tenth, but in the other case, Scripture testifies that he lives" (Heb. 7:8; CSB). The greater context and purpose of Hebrews 7 is to demonstrate the priestly order of Melchizedek as an Old Testament typology of Jesus. Nevertheless, the point is made by the writer of Hebrews that the Scriptures can, and indeed does, *witness* or *testifies* to Christ (cf. Heb. 7:8, 17). In short, *μαρτυρέω* used in the aforementioned instance of the immediate passage, overall book, and the New Testament is defined as a verb to testify and to give a good account/record.

The Law of Moses *μαρτυρέω*

So, the question then becomes, "How do the Scriptures (OT) bear witness to Jesus? Taking Jesus' words found in Luke 24:44 will serve as a tri-fold template to show how salient examples in the *γραφή* indeed *μαρτυρέω* to Jesus: in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and in the Psalms.

First, the Law of Moses testifies to who Jesus is. Most notably, Moses wrote of Jesus in the spring festival of the Passover (Ex. 12:1-28; Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-8). Indeed, theologian Robert Dean Jr. states, "Passover foreshadowed redemption through the crucifixion of the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29; I Corinthians 5:7). Christ was crucified on Passover eve as a substitute for the sins of the world (John 19:14)."²³ In this very short example, Dean sees the OT bearing witness about Jesus in this specific way at least twice in John's Gospel (cf. Jn. 1:29; Jn. 19:14). Moreover, one of the witnesses that Jesus states *μαρτυρέω* to who He is was John the Baptist, who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (1:29).

This was Jesus' first witness He "called upon" (5:33-35) in His trial setting. Interestingly enough, prior to Jesus mentioning John the Baptist (who testified to Jesus being the fulfillment of the Passover), heals on the Sabbath, which the Sabbath is mentioned prior to the Passover in the *γραφή* (cf. Jn. 5:1-17; Lev. 23:3).

²³ Ibid.

It is as if Jesus was even fulfilling the feasts days in the *γραφή* sequentially (Lev. 23:3-8)!

The Prophets *μαρτυρέω*

Not only does Moses *μαρτυρέω*, but so do the prophets. Jesus brings another witness to His case... His works (Jn. 5:36). Theologian Elmer Towns beautifully illustrates how Daniel the prophet *μαρτυρέω* to Jesus. Elmer states the works Jesus was specifically referring to was, “the distinctively messianic works prophesied by Daniel.”²⁴ Elmer lists them as such:

The Messianic Works of Daniel 9:24

- **Finish the transgression**
- **Make an end of sins**
- **Make reconciliation for iniquity**
- **Bring in everlasting righteousness**
- **Seal up the vision of prophecy**
- **Anoint the most holy place²⁵**

Indeed, Jesus being the *Passover Lamb* is the fulfillment in the Law of Moses, thus fulfilling the *writings of the Prophets*. In this case, Jesus fulfills prophecies of Daniel reconciling sinners to the Father! Elmer is certainly correct to include Dan. 9:24 in this regard. In each Scripture that Jesus fulfills, compounds the others *γραφή*, insofar it fulfills one another. In other words, by Jesus fulfilling one aspect of *γραφή*, He fulfills another, which again is no mere coincidence!

The Psalms *μαρτυρέω*

Amazingly, the Law of Moses and the Prophets *μαρτυρέω* to Jesus’, coinciding to His first two witnesses: John the Baptist, and His works. Now, Jesus lists arguably one of the most important witness in case, His Father, which correlates to the next *γραφή* that bear witness to Him, the Psalms (5:37-38). In fact, Jesus quotes Psalm 110, putting an end to the Pharisees “games,” while simultaneously interpreting a very difficult passage for His listeners. In a stunning fashion, Jesus accomplishes this by drawing attention to David’s writing “in the Spirit” which illuminates both the Holy Spirit and the Father bearing witness to His Son, Jesus Christ! Dr. Hindson illustrates this point best:

²⁴ Towns, 54.

²⁵ Ibid.

In this psalm David refers to the Messiah as his Lord, thus He is more than just David's "son." The verse says: "The LORD [Jehovah God] said to my Lord [the Messiah], Sit at My right hand, until I [God] put Thine enemies [the enemies of the Messiah] beneath Thy feet" (the final messianic victory overall who oppose Christ). Jesus totally stumped the Pharisees who wanted to believe in a human Messiah but not a divine Messiah. However, Psalm 110 indicated both, and they were speechless.²⁶

Jesus could very well be referring to the Father bearing witness to Him in John 5:37-38 either via the OT (which would certainly be true), or Jesus could be referring in this instance to "the Father's statement at Jesus baptism (Mark 1:11)."²⁷ Either way, this example only furthers the point that the Psalms (*γραφῆ*) indeed *μαρτυρέω* to who Jesus Christ is! In fact, all *γραφῆ* (OT) in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms *μαρτυρέω* to the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 22:44; Jn. 5:39).

Canonical Context

Now that the key words used in John 5:30-47 has been investigated and established, one can be sure to apply these definitions and understandings to its canonical context. With this in mind, John has a certain literary style and purpose for his Gospel. John writes to convince His readers that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Furthermore, John wants his readers to believe in Christ and receive eternal life through Him. Indeed, Towns builds the canonical context of the Gospel of John and states the key words of *witness* is of significant use all throughout.²⁸ In his commentary, he pens the several witnesses which Jesus states who "testify" to who He is:

Eight Witnesses in John:

- **Witness of the Father (5:32, 34, 37; 8:18)**
- **Witness of the Son (3:11; 8:14, 18; 18:37)**
- **Witness of the Holy Spirit (15:26; 16:13-14)**
- **Witness of the Scriptures (1:45; 5:39, 40, 46)**

²⁶ Hindson, 202.

²⁷ Towns, 54.

²⁸ Ibid., 53.

- **Witness of the works of Jesus (5:17, 36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:24)**
- **Witness of the Baptist (1:7-8; 5:33-35)**
- **Witness of the disciples (including John) (15:27; 19:35; 21:24)**
- **Witness of changed lives (4:39; 9:25, 38; 12:17)²⁹**

The significance of naming all of listing all of these, is the fact that in just the short biblical passage of John 5:30-47, four out of the eight witnesses appear: John the Baptist (5:33-35), Jesus' works (5:36), the Father (5:37-38), and the Scriptures (5:39-47).³⁰ This one fact alone, furthers the significance of such a passage as John 5:30-47. Prior to this passage, John records Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath at the Pool of Bethesda (cf. 5:1-15). The Jews obviously did not approve of Jesus conducting such actions on the Sabbath.

Consequently, Jesus' *trial* comes about because the Jews were persecuting and seeking to kill Jesus, hence Scripture states, "because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (J5:18). This leads us to this very point and passage and answers the question "Why did Jesus give the answer he did to the Jews?" This now leads one to investigate the setting and historical context.

Historical Context

To better understand the answer Jesus' gives to the Jews, one will have to build a historical context of the passage. Theologian Gary M. Burge states:

John 5:31 is crucial in Jesus' trial. In Old Testament law, more than one witness was needed in order to condemn someone (Deut. 17:6). This idea was expanded in judicial settings to say that more than one person was needed to confirm someone's testimony (*Mishnah, Ketuboth* 2:9) In 5:31 Jesus is not saying that any self-testimony he gives is false, but rather that its validity is inadmissible unless it is confirmed by other witnesses. Jesus' claims are extraordinary. But if he is the only one making them, they will carry little weight with his audience. But if the claims are corroborated, they stand.³¹

And indeed, they do! Each witness Jesus "brings to the table" only corroborates His claim to be God. Again, Burge only furthers the fact that the *scriptures bear witness* to who Jesus is because Jesus does not abolish the Law, but rather fulfills it. Jesus

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

³¹ Burge, 179.

accomplishes this by following the Law of Moses, namely Deut. 17:6 (Mt. 5:17). By Jesus wishing to give solid evidence to His audience through “many more witnesses than needed,” He is only furthering the confirmation of who He is. Theologian Craig S. Keener also makes the same vital background and contextual observation to Jn. 5:31 and states:

5:31. Here Jesus cites the Old Testament principle, central to later Jewish law (both that of the rabbis and that of the Dead Sea Scrolls), that two witnesses are necessary to prove a (capital) case (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Testimony was essential in ancient Jewish court cases.³²

So, Jesus is building His defense against those who wish to accuse Him. Thereupon, Jesus takes a very methodical approach. Jesus does not just use His witnesses as a defense, but also as a means to prosecute. Burge again adds key background context and states this point best:

Unlike today, defendants did not simply prove their innocence and thus end the trial. Jewish trials worked to uncover the truth, and accusers who made false claims in court could find themselves placed in the defense and subject to serious jeopardy.³³

With that said, those listening to Jesus’ case in this setting would understand well where the flow and transition of this trial was headed. Jesus ends His own case with the offensive strike, a critical blow... the “prosecuting hammer!” The result ended in Jesus’ innocence and his accusers found guilty. Jesus had not only successfully defeated his accusers arguments, complaints, and accusations, but flipped the entire case back on them.

Theological Context

Therefore, when Jesus concludes His trial, He does not just use any Old Testament writer, but “Moses, on whom you have set your hope” (Jn. 5:45). In fact, Jesus states that Moses will be their “prosecutor” (Jn. 45).³⁴ Jesus makes this statement in such a manner it begs the question, “Who is this man that speaks with such authority as if he personally knows Moses and what Moses will be doing on that

³² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 264.

³³ Burge, 180.

³⁴ Keener, 265.

day?” Of course, knowing the canonical context, one knows that John is portraying Jesus as the Son of God. When one comes to the conclusion that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh, the words of Jesus in John 5:30-47 make complete sense. If Jesus is God, of course He would know if Moses would be accusing them to the Father, because He knows Moses personally. That is John’s point here. Jesus is speaking from that position of authority. Jesus Christ is equal to the Father and knows what Moses will be doing on that day.

The main purpose of this paper however, is to establish what Jesus’ perspective on Scripture is. Therefore, all of the details thus far come into play. The key verse is: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (Jn. 5:39). As stated earlier, one can be certain that the word *γραφή* is used in the plural to refer to the Old Testament as a whole and not in part. Again, the word *μαρτυρέω* is a verb that bears witness to Jesus and who He is. It is here that Jesus makes the claim to be God and declares the authority of Scripture. The logic goes like this: if the Scriptures have error, then according to John, Jesus declared that erroneous *writings bear witness* to Him. Jesus would never declare fables, false, fake, nor documents containing even slight errors to describe or even testify about himself, let alone in His own trial! Moreover, Jesus stated:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Mt. 5:17-18).

Thus, it is more than fitting that Jesus declared that the *γραφή* (Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms) *μαρτυρέω* of Him, because He is the fulfillment of them (Jn. 5:39; Mt. 5:17)!

Concluding Thoughts

After all, Jesus declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (Jn. 14:6). In this Scripture alone, Jesus declares to not only speak truth, but He Himself *is* Truth. Furthermore, Jesus tells His opponents, “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?” (Jn. 5:46-47). Indeed, by asking this question in its context, Jesus is implying that it cannot be done! Köstenberger puts it like this, “to read the OT without seeing that it all points to Jesus fail to understand its message.”³⁵ In another way, to reject the Old Testament as infallible and authoritative is to reject

³⁵ Köstenberger, 2033.

Jesus in a likewise manner, resulting in judgment. Faith in Jesus must be accompanied by believing in who He sent.

Certainly, Jesus declared Scripture's inerrancy, infallibility, and its ultimate authority, simply by one verse alone (5:39). Furthermore, simply by simply "having the Scriptures" does not equate to eternal life. Scriptures *μαρτυρέω* or point to the one who is *Life*... Jesus Christ (14:6). Moreover, Jesus has the authority to give life to whom He pleases, thus making Him equal to God, which is a prerogative of God alone (5:21, 40).³⁶

Everyday Application

Indeed, the doctrines of Christology and Bibliology are clear and stand out in this passage. If the OT is not true or has error, Jesus would never declare to fulfill them. To this end, Jesus' perspective of Scripture stands as: absolute truth, actual historical events, real people, real places, infallible, and completely authoritative. Meanwhile, Warren W. Wiersbe states the unbelief of Jesus opponents best at some length:

There was something wrong with the minds of these Jewish leaders: They did not see Christ in their own Scriptures (see 2 Cor. 3:14-18; 4:3-6). But there was also something wrong with their *wills*. They would not trust in the Savior. Because they did not have the Word in their hearts, they did not want Christ in their hearts. They were religious and self-righteous, but they were not saved. These leaders had a third problem, and this was the lack of love in their hearts.³⁷

This modern (21st century) generation is no different than the religious opponents of Jesus' day when people say, "I believe in Jesus, but I do not believe all the words of the Bible are true." Those who accept Jesus but reject the Old Testament and its writers (who were sent by God), reflect the same spiritual sickness as the religious opponents in Jesus' day. They believe they have eternal life because they think faith does not require for them to believe in the authority of God's word. But according to Jesus, faith is to believe in Him entirely and whom the Father sent, namely, Moses and the Prophets (e.g. Jn. 5:46-47).

In order to apply these truths to everyday life, one must adopt the exact perspective Jesus had of Scripture. One must believe in the writings of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. In other words, one must have faith in the whole OT.

³⁶ Robert M. Bowman, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 208-209.

³⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *BE Alive: Get to Know the Living Savior NT Commentary John 1-12* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1986), 88.

Therefore, by believing in the authority and infallibility of the Old and New Testament alike, inherently should lead a believer to a genuine faith-based relationship with Jesus, believing in: His deity, His words, and accepting Him as the Son of God and Lord of one's life. Without a doubt, the *Scriptures bear witness!*

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