

## John: 5:31–46

### From Catena Aurea:

31. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

32. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.

33. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.

34. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved.

35. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

36. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

37. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.

38. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

39. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

40. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 1) He now brings proof of those high declarations respecting Himself. He answers an objection: If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. These are Christ's own words. But does not Christ in many places bear witness of Himself? And if all this is false, where is our hope of salvation? Whence shall we obtain truth, when the Truth Itself says, My witness is not true. We must believe then that true, here, is said, not with reference to the intrinsic value of His testimony, but to their suspicions; for the Jews might say, We do not believe Thee, because no one who bears witness to himself is to be depended on. In answer then, he puts forth three clear and irrefragable proofs, three witnesses as it were, to the truth of what He had said; the works which He had done, the testimony of the Father, and the

preaching of John: putting the least of these foremost, i. e. the preaching of John: There is another that beareth witness of Me: and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of Me is true.

**AUGUSTINE.** (de Verb. Dom. s. 43) He knew Himself that His witness of Himself was true, but in compassion to the weak and unbelieving, the Sun sought for candles, that their weak sight might not be dazzled by His full blaze. And therefore John was brought forward to give his testimony to the truth. Not that there is such testimony really, for whatever witnesses bear witness to Him, it is really He who bears witness to Himself; as it is His dwelling in the witnesses, which moves them so to give their witness to the truth.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 2) But according to the former interpretation, they might say to Him, If Thy witness is not true, how sayest Thou, I know that the witness of John is true? But His answer meets the objection: Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness of the truth: as if to say: Ye would not have sent to John, if ye had not thought him worthy of credit. And what is more remarkable, they did send to him, not to ask Him about Christ, but about himself. For they who were sent out did not say, What sayest thou of Christ? but, Who art thou? what sayest thou of thyself? (c. 1:22) In so great admiration did they hold him.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 2) Even the witness of John was the witness of God: for what he said, God taught him. But to anticipate their asking how it appeared that God taught John, as if the Jews had objected that John's witness might not be true, our Lord anticipates them by saying, "Ye sought him yourselves to enquire of him; that is why I use his testimony, for I need it not." He adds, But these things I say that ye might be saved. As if He said, I being God, needed not this human kind of testimony. But, since ye attend more to him, and think him more worthy of credit than any one else, while ye do not believe me, though I work miracles; for this cause I remind you of his testimony. But had they not received John's testimony? Before they have time to ask this, He answers it: He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. He says this to shew, how lightly they had held by John, and how soon they had left him, thus preventing him from leading them to Christ. He calls him a candle, because John had not his light from himself, but from the grace of the Holy Spirit.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 2) I therefore direct you to John, not because I want his testimony, but that ye may be saved: for I have greater witness than that of John, i. e. that of my works; The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me.

**HILARY.** (vi. de Trin. c. 27) The Only-begotten God shews Himself to be the Son, on the testimony not of man only, but of His own power. The works which He does, bear witness to His being sent from the Father. Therefore the obedience of the Son and the authority of the Father are set forth in Him who was sent. But the testimony of works not being sufficient evidence, it follows, And the Father Himself which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Open the Evangelic volumes, and examine their whole range: no testimony of the Father to the Son is given in any of the books, other than that He is the Son. So what a calumny is it in men now saying that this is only a name of adoption: thus making God a liar, and names unmeaning.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 3) How then says Moses, Ask—whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is: did ever people hear the voice of God, speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard and seen? (Deut. 4:32, 33) Isaiah too, and many others, are said to have seen Him. So what does Christ mean here? He means to impress upon them the philosophical doctrine, that God has neither voice, or appearance, or shape; but is superior to such modes of speaking of Him. For as in saying, Ye have never heard His voice, He does not mean to say that He has a voice, only not an audible one to them; so when He says, Nor have even His shape, no tangible, sensible, or visible shape is implied to belong to God: but all such mode of speaking is pronounced inapplicable to God.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 3) But it was impossible for them to declare that they had received, and obeyed God's commands: and therefore He adds, Ye have not His word abiding in you; i. e. the commandments, the law, and the prophets; though God instituted them, ye have them not. For if the Scriptures every where tell you to believe on Me, and ye believe not, it is manifest that His word is gone from you: For whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xl. 3) Or the connection may be given thus. They might say to Him, How, if we have never heard God's voice, has God borne witness to you? So He says, Search the Scriptures; meaning that God had borne witness of Him by the Scriptures. He had borne witness indeed at the Jordan, and on the mount. But they did not hear the voice on the mount, and did not attend to it at the Jordan. Wherefore He sends them to the Scriptures, when they would also find the Father's testimony. (Hom. xli. 1). He did not send them however to the Scriptures simply to read them, but to examine them attentively, because Scripture ever threw a shade over its own meaning, and did not display it on the surface. The treasure was, as it were, hidden from their eye. He does not say, For in them ye have eternal life, but, For in them ye think ye have eternal life; meaning that they did not reap much fruit from the Scriptures, thinking, as they did, that they should be saved by the mere reading of them, without faith. For which reason He adds, Ye will not come to Me; i. e. ye will not believe on Me.

5:41–47

41. I receive not honour from men.

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

43. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

44. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

45. Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

46. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

47. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xli. 1) Our Lord having made mention of John, and the witness of God, and His own works, many, who did not see that His motive was to induce them to believe, might suspect Him of a desire for human glory, and therefore He says, I receive not honour from men: i. e. I do not want it. My nature is not such as to want that glory, which cometh from men. For if the Son receives no addition from the light of a candle, much more am not I in want of human glory.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xli. 1) As if to say, I said this to prove that it is not from your love of God, that you persecute Me; for He bears witness to Me, by My own works, and by the Scriptures. So that, if ye loved God, as ye rejected Me, thinking Me against God, so now ye would come to Me. But ye do not love Him. And He proves this, not only from what they do now, but from what they will do in time to come: I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. He says plainly, I am come in the Father's name, that they might never be able to plead ignorance as an excuse

**AUGUSTINE.** (de Verb. Dom. Serm. 45. a med.) Hear John, As ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists. (1 John 2:18) But what dost thou dread in Antichrist, except that he will exalt his own name, and despise the name of the Lord? And what else does he do, who says, "I justify;"

or those who say, “Unless we are good, ye must perish?” Wherefore my life shall depend on Thee, and my salvation shall be fastened to Thee. Shall I so forget my foundation? Is not my rock Christ?

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xli. 13.) Here is the crowning proof of their impiety. He says, as it were, If it was the love of God that made you persecute me, you would persecute Antichrist much more: for he does not profess to be sent by the Father, or to come according to His will; but, on the contrary, usurping what does not belong to him, will proclaim himself to be God over all. It is manifest that your persecution of Me is from malice and hatred of God. Then He gives the reason of their unbelief: How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? another proof this, that theirs was not a zeal for God, but a gratification of their own passions.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xli. 2) For I am not come to condemn, but to save. There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom you trust. As He had said of the Scriptures above: In them ye think ye have eternal life. So now of Moses He says, In whom ye trust, always answering them out of their authorities. But they will say, How will he accuse us? What hast Thou to do with Moses, Thou who hast broken the sabbath? So He adds: For had ye believed Moses, ye would perhaps have believed Me, for he wrote of me, This is connected with what was said before. For where evidence that He came from God had been forced upon them by His words, by the voice of John, and the testimony of the Father, it was certain that Moses would condemn them; (alluding to Deut. 13:1.) for he had said, If any one shall come, doing miracles, leading men to God, and foretelling the future with certainty, you must obey him. Christ did all this, and they did not obey Him.

**AUGUSTINE.** (cont. Faust. l. xvi. c. 9) But, in fact, the whole that Moses wrote, was written of Christ, i. e. it has reference to Him principally; whether it point to Him by figurative actions, or expression; or set forth His grace and glory.

But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words.

**THEOPHYLACT.** As if He said, He has even written, and has left his books among you, as a constant memento to you, lest you forget His words. And since you believe not his writings, how can ye believe My unwritten words?

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. xli. 2) Indeed had they attended to His words, they ought and would have tried to learn from Him, what the things were which Moses had written of Him. But they are silent. For it is the nature of wickedness to defy persuasion. Do what you will, it retains its venom to the last.

## **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

### **5:31 If I Testify About Myself**

### **5:32 Another Bears Witness to Me**

### **5:33–34 John Sent as Witness to the Truth**

#### **The Witness of John.**

Chrysostom: What Jesus says is like this: I, being God, did not need the witness of John, which is a human witness. And yet, because you listened to him and believe that he is more trustworthy than anyone else, and because you ran to him as to a prophet (for “all the city came out to the Jordan”) and, finally, because you have not believed on me even when I performed miracles, therefore I remind you of that witness of his. Homilies on the Gospel of John 40.2.

#### **John Is Trustworthy Because He Was Sent from God.**

Ephrem the Syrian: If he [our Lord] was not receiving testimony from human beings, why did he go to John to receive testimony from him? John, however, was sent from God: “He who sent us spoke to me.” Through John, the Father was testifying about him, just as he [our Lord] said, “Moses also wrote about me,” along with other statements. Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 13.11.

### **5:35 A Burning, Shining Lamp**

#### **The Prophets and Apostles Are Lamps of God.**

Augustine: All people are lamps because they can both be lighted and extinguished.... Only [Christ] is not a lamp. For he is not lighted and extinguished, because “as the Father has life in himself, so he has given to the Son to have life in himself.” Therefore, the apostles, too, are lamps. And they give thanks because they both have been kindled by the light of truth and burn with the Spirit of love, and the oil of God’s grace is available to them. If they were not lamps, the Lord would not say to them, “You are the light of the world.” For after he said, “You are the light of the world,” he shows that they should not think they

were such a light as that of which it is said, “It was the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 23.3.1–2.

### **John’s Light Was Dimming.**

Ephrem the Syrian: “He [John] was a lamp that was burning,” which even as it grew was also passing away, for he was shining in the night so that he might show that the appointed time of the sun’s power was fading, and its beams of light were vanishing. Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 13.10.

## **5:36 The Works Testify That Christ Is Sent by the Father**

### **The Works Are Evidence of Sonship.**

Hilary of Poitiers: God the Only Begotten proves his Sonship by an appeal not only to the name but to the power. The works that he does are evidence that he has been sent by the Father. What, I [Hilary] ask, is the fact that these works prove? They prove that he was sent. That he was sent, in turn, is used as a proof of his Son-like obedience and of his Father’s authority. For the works that he does could not possibly be done by any other than the one who is sent by the Father.... Open the Gospel volumes and examine the whole range of their content.... No testimony of the Father to the Son is given in any of the books other than that he is the Son. So it is nothing short of deception when people now say that this is only a name of adoption, thus making God a liar and names without meaning. On the Trinity 6.27.

### **Christ Works the Works, and the Father Testifies Through Them.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Are they blameless, in that they did not know the testimony of the Father who was never heard or seen among them and whose word was not abiding in them? No, for they cannot plead that his testimony was hidden from them. As Christ says, the testimony of his works is the testimony of the Father concerning him. His works testify of him that he was sent of the Father; but the testimony of these works is the Father’s testimony. Since, therefore, the working of the Son is the Father’s testimony, it follows of necessity that the same nature was operative in Christ, by which the Father testifies of him. So Christ, who does the works, and the Father, who testifies through them, are revealed as possessing one inseparable nature through the birth, for the work that Christ does is shown itself to be the testimony of God concerning him. On the Trinity 9.20.

## **5:37 The Father's Voice Unheard, His Form Not Seen**

### **Anthropomorphic Language and God.**

Chrysostom: How then did God speak and Moses answered? How did David hear a tongue that he did not know? Did people ever hear the voice of God [speaking out of the midst of the fire], as you [Moses] have heard his voice and seen his shape? Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are said to have seen him, and many others. So what does Christ mean here? He means to impress upon them the philosophical understanding that God has neither voice nor shape but is superior to such modes of speaking about him. For as in saying, "You have never heard his voice," he does not mean to say that he has a voice but that they just cannot hear it. And also, when he says, "Nor have they ever seen his form," no tangible, sensible or visible shape is implied to belong to God.... But why, he says, do I bring these things up? I do so because not only have you never heard his voice or seen his shape, but it is not even in your power to assert what you are most proud and assured of: that you have received and kept his commandments. Homilies on the Gospel of John 40.3.

### **Voice and Form Are Standing in Front of Them.**

Cyril of Alexandria: The puffed-up Pharisees liked to pretend that the divine Word was with them and in them and that they had come to an advanced level of wisdom.... But here they are, rejecting the living and hypostatic Word of God. Their faith was not directed toward him. Instead they dishonored the impress of God the Father and refused to behold his most true form (so to say) through his God-befitting authority and power. For the divine and ineffable nature is in no other way apprehended (so far as it may be) by us than through what it effects and works. This is why Paul directs us to go from the greatness and beauty of the creatures to the proportionately higher contemplation of the Creator. ... This is why Jesus finds fault with Philip, who thoughtlessly imagined that he could in any other way attain to the contemplation of God the Father. It was in Philip's power, however, to consider Jesus' uncreated image, which shows accurately in himself the One who begat him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 3.2.

## **5:38 His Word Does Not Abide in You**

### **The Word Is the Form of His Father.**

Athanasius: It is most appropriate that he joins the “Word” to the “form” here to show that the Word of God is himself the image and expression and form of his Father. The Jews who did not receive the one who spoke to them thus did not receive the Word, which is the form of God. This too was who the patriarch Jacob saw when he received a blessing from him and the name of Israel instead of Jacob. ... And this is he who said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” and “I in the Father and the Father in me” and “I and the Father are one.” For in this way God is one and so is the faith in the Father and the Son. For even though the Word is God, the Lord our God is one Lord. Discourses Against the Arians 3.25.16.

### **Scriptures Everywhere Tell Them of Christ.**

Chrysostom: It was not even in their power to assert what they boasted the most about, that is, that they had received and obeyed God’s commands. Therefore he adds, “You do not have his word abiding in you,” that is, the commandments, the Law and the Prophets. Although God instituted them, you do not have them. For if the Scriptures everywhere tell you to believe in me and you still do not believe, it is clear that his word has departed from you. “For you do not believe him whom he has sent.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 40.3.

## **5:39 Search the Scriptures for Christ**

### **Finding the Father’s Testimony.**

Chrysostom: They might say to him: How, if we have never heard God’s voice, has God borne witness to you? And so, Jesus says to them, “Search the Scriptures ...” meaning that the Father had borne witness of him by the Scriptures. Indeed, he had borne witness at the Jordan and on the mountain [of transfiguration].... But they did not hear the voice on the mountain and did not listen to it at the Jordan. This is why he sends them to the Scriptures, where they would also find the Father’s testimony. Homilies on the Gospel of John 40.3.

### **Do Not Only Read but Also Examine Scripture.**

Chrysostom: He tells them not to simply “read the Scriptures” but “search the Scriptures.” ... These sayings were not on the surface or out in the open but were hidden very deep like some treasure. Anyone who searches for hidden things, unless they are careful and diligent, will never find the object of their search. This is why he says ..., “For in them you think you have eternal life,” meaning that they did not reap much fruit from the Scriptures, thinking, as they did, that they should be saved by the mere reading of them, without faith.... And so, it was with good reason that he said “you think,” because they did not actually listen to what the Scripture had to say but merely prided themselves on the bare reading. Homilies on the Gospel of John 41.1.

### **The Scriptures Contain All the Wisdom of Life.**

Sahdona: For all the wisdom of life is hidden in the Scriptures. In them we are able to gain knowledge of God and of his creative activity, of his wonderful governance and providence; likewise of his goodness and, at the same time of his righteousness, and, in sum, of his great and mighty power. Anyone who is deprived of a knowledge of the Scriptures cannot withstand the power of God. ... It is from the Scriptures that we learn how to travel on the road of virtue, for in them all the fine deeds of the just life are delineated. One cannot see anything without light, for it is light that enables us to see, as it is written, “By light we see light.” Similarly, without the light of the Scriptures we are unable to see God, who is light, or his justice, which is filled with light. The effort involved in reading the Scriptures is thus greatly beneficial to us, all the more so since it causes us to become illumined in prayer. For anyone whose soul, after having labored in reading and having been purified by spiritual meditation, is fervent with love for God, will pray in a luminous manner when he turns to prayer and the divine office, and he will recite the psalms without distraction. This is because his mind has labored in meditation on divine providence and so is filled with joy. Book of Perfection 49–51.

### **5:41–42 I Do Not Accept Glory from Human Beings**

### **5:43 Jesus Has Come in His Father's Name**

#### **Antichrist Received More Readily Than Christ.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Jesus comes in the name of the Father, that is, he is not himself the Father and yet is in the same divine nature as the Father. For as Son and God it is natural for him to come in the name of the Father. But then, when another comes in the same name [ironically] he is the one they will receive. And he is one from whom people will expect glory and to whom they will give glory in return, though he will pretend to have come in the name of the Father. By this, doubtless, is signified the antichrist, glorying in his false use of the Father's name. He is the one they will glorify, and they will be glorified by him. But the glory of him who alone is God they will not seek. On the Trinity 9.22.

### **5:44 The Only Worthwhile Glory**

#### **Hunting for Honor Among People Comes Up Short.**

Cyril of Alexandria: He accuses the Pharisees of a love for power and of prizing honors from people. He is covertly hinting that it is exceedingly inadvisable to put the diseases of their own soul on God, who can by no means have anything to do with disease. He goes on to say that they, held fast by an empty kind of glory, thereby lose the fairest prize, meaning faith in him. Paul speaks clearly of this too when he says, "For if I were yet pleasing people, I should not be Christ's servant." It is almost always necessarily the case that those who hunt for honors from people fail when it comes to the glory that comes from above and from the only God. Commentary on the Gospel of John 3.2.

### **5:45 Moses Is Your Accuser**

#### **Jesus Uses Their Own Authorities.**

Chrysostom: See how he takes away all of their excuses: ... You maintain that you believe in Moses in what you dare to do against me, he says. I, on the contrary, show that this is the worst kind of misbelief in Moses you can think of. I am so far from opposing that law that he who shall accuse you is none other than the man who gave you the law. In other words, he says now of Moses what he had said of the Scriptures above, "In them you think you have eternal life." And so here he speaks of Moses as someone

“in whom you trust.” Jesus is always answering them from their own authorities. Homilies on the Gospel of John 41.2.

### **5:46–47 Moses Wrote About Christ**

#### **In Every Way Christ Fulfills Moses’ Prophecy.**

Chrysostom: Someone might say, “What do you have to do with Moses when you broke the very sabbath that he ordained we should keep? How then does Moses accuse us? And why should we believe on someone else who comes in his own name? All these assertions you make have no evidence to back them up.” Now in truth all these points are proved above. “For,” [Christ would reply] “since it is acknowledged that I came from God by my works, by the voice of John and the testimony of the Father, it is certain that Moses too would condemn you.” For Moses had said that if any one shall come doing miracles, leading people to God and foretelling the future with certainty, you must obey him. Now Christ had done all this. Homilies on the Gospel of John 41.2.

#### **Christ’s Words.**

Irenaeus: Christ here indicates in the clearest possible way that the writings of Moses are his words. If, then, this is the case with Moses, then it is also beyond doubt that the words of the other prophets are his words as well. Against Heresies 4.2.3.

#### **The Mediator Gave the Law to Moses.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Moses, indeed, will refute you with the whole volume of the law, ordained through angels, which he received by the hand of the Mediator. Enquire whether he who gave the law was not true God, for the Mediator was the Giver. And was it not to meet God that Moses led the people out to the mountain? Was it not God who came down onto the mountain? Or was it, perhaps, only by a fiction or an adoption, and not by right of nature, that he who did all this bore the name of God?... In your eyes is he not God just because he addressed you through the weak faculties of a man so that you might hear and live? On the Trinity 5.23.

### **The Kernel Is Hidden in the Husk.**

Augustine: But just as in barley the kernel is hidden in the husk, so Christ is hidden under the wraps of the mysteries of the law. Like bread, those mysteries are expounded and expanded. Sermon 130.1.