

# The Witness of the Scripture

## John 5:39-47

Many people will acknowledge that the Bible is great literature and then stop there. They are totally oblivious to the fact that the Bible transforms lives: that reprobates have become upstanding citizens; that sorrowing people have found the source of true joy; and that atheists have become great preachers—all after they came into contact with the truths of the Bible.

Earlier we ask the question, “*How can you know Jesus is God and the Messiah?*” We found five answers to that question in John 5:30-38: 1) Because God the Father Himself said so; 2) Because Jesus affirmed it Himself; 3) Because of the witness of John the Baptist; 4) Because of the witness given by all the miracles Jesus did; and finally 5) By fulfillment of prophecy. Now we are going to look at the sixth piece of evidence or witness: the perfection of Scripture.

A New Zealand preacher described a Pharisee as being like a bag tied in the middle. Anything put into the top will not reach the bottom. The Pharisee opens his mouth wide when he prays, but his heart is tightly shut. With his lips he asks for things that his heart does not really desire. If God were to give him the spiritual blessings he asks for, it would only be a waste of good gifts, for they could not get to the bottom of the bag. His pride would choke them off, and they would never touch his heart.<sup>1</sup> Now you may not relate well to the term *Pharisee*, but today we could call such a person a nominal Christian or a hypocrite.

### John 5:39-47 ESV:

*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.*

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Illustrations, *Pride*.

*46 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?"*

What in the world is the matter with the people of this world that prevents them from accepting the perfect word of God? How many people say they believe in God but they cannot believe in Jesus? This borders on irrationality. Then there are those that say, *"I am spiritual, I believe in God but I cannot believe all that stuff in the Bible because it just does not make any sense to me. I believe God appears to different people in different ways and there are all kinds of roads that lead to Heaven for people of different faiths."*

Now, in the first place, the people with whom I have talked and who voice such opinions have never really read the Bible, or the doctrine of any other religion for that matter. Yet they have no hesitation to speak with authority about something they know nothing about. What these people are saying is that God, knowing how brilliant each human is, did not feel it was necessary to record a *"Manual for Living"* for the creatures He created. They hold that He knew that people would simply know the truth about Him just because of the way they think. However, we do not think those same people would buy a computer or a new software program and never check the "help" manual about how to use it effectively.

Do you know what that tells us? It tells us that you might believe that everyone goes to Heaven, while we believe a person only goes to Heaven by believing in Jesus' death on the cross for their sins; but someone else believes you have to do a good deed every day, and yet someone else believes you need to wage war against those that hold to different beliefs. We could go on and on with this reasoning until we might have hundreds of different beliefs about how a person gets to Heaven. Does it not seem a bit ridiculous to believe that anyone can get to Heaven by following the path that they alone think is right, when that means doing the exact opposite of what someone else thinks should be done to get to Heaven? If that were possible there would be no need for a god, would there? In effect everybody could be their own god. Why believe in a god if you believe you can determine all the rules for living? That would mean that you are smarter than He is, so why not just do without Him? What could such a god possibly teach you? After all if you do not need a god who can provide you with many benefits you do not already have, what good is He? Such a person therefore must be at perfect peace in their life without any troubles or cares, without any financial worries, without any problems in relationships, without any health problems, or fears about death. After all if you can set the ground rules for the god you believe in and you need nothing from him other than a pat on the back, it seems that your god should actually be worshipping you or maybe that you feel you are god yourself. But that reminds me of Isaiah 42:8 NIV, a verse that should give us warning about such an attitude:

*"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."*

So if we imagine that all the things we have just been describing were true, then all of these confused, irrational people would go to Heaven and be allowed to practice their misguided beliefs up there. That would mean that Heaven would be no better than life on

earth. How would you like to spend eternity with the same kind of uncertainty, turmoil, and hatred that we live with right now? That would not be Heaven would it? That would be Hell. The same thing would be true if there were more than one god. Can you imagine the chaos and bickering in Heaven among the various gods for control and among their followers to prove who is right? Who would want to spend eternity in such a place? Such beliefs are not only misguided, they are intentionally planted in a person's mind by the master deceiver, Satan.

Friends, people who think in the variety of self-serving ways we have been discussing are cheating themselves out of an abundance of joy **if** they really believe that we human beings are capable of determining, on our own, how God thinks.

There is only one rock solid explanation for who God is and what He expects, and that is found in the Bible. The writings of other religious books are full of contradictions and they lack the power and wonder of the Bible. There can only be one sensible conclusion here and that is that there had to be an intelligence beyond our ability to understand that created the universe and everything in it. That intelligence and that Creator is God. Why He created people is something those of us who make it to Heaven will have to ask Him when we get there because we certainly have been a big disappointment to Him from the very beginning with Adam and Eve in the garden. But because we came from the perfect plan of God we can know He had a good reason, and when you see a person who sincerely lives the Christian life according to God's plan and has no phoniness or personal agenda to fulfill, they are a joy to know and be around.

Having created "people" and watching them stumble and fall into sin, often willingly, God could clearly see that if they did not have some kind of instruction manual for life there would be chaos on the earth and all people would be lost to sin for eternity. He knew that people would not automatically, because of their own understanding, be able to know His will for their lives, so it was necessary to give them specific instructions for living along with promises for obeying and warnings for disobeying.

So God began to write this manual for living and He used men and women to write down what the Holy Spirit of God led them to write. God used Moses to write the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. After Moses, God used many other individuals over the next 1,500 years to write the different books of the Bible, including the New Testament. But, in spite of having the Word and promises of God, His own people, the Jews, continued to defy, ignore, and reject what He told them.

Before beginning our study of John 5:39-47, we believe it would be helpful to know how God feels about obedience and disobedience to His Word. Let us read selections from **Deuteronomy 28 NLT**:

The first part of the chapter outlines the **Blessings for Obedience**:

*1 "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the Lord your God will set you high*

*above all the nations of the world.*

*2 You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God:*

*3 Your towns and your fields will be blessed.*

*4 Your children and your crops will be blessed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be blessed.*

*5 Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be blessed.*

*6 Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be blessed.*

*7 "The Lord will conquer your enemies when they attack you. They will attack you from one direction, but they will scatter from you in seven!"*

*8 "The Lord will guarantee a blessing on everything you do and will fill your storehouses with grain. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.*

*9 "If you obey the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways, the Lord will establish you as his holy people as he swore he would do.*

*10 Then all the nations of the world will see that you are a people claimed by the Lord, and they will stand in awe of you.*

Then the chapter goes on to outline the **Curses for Disobedience:**

*15 "But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you:*

*16 Your towns and your fields will be cursed*

*18 Your children and your crops will be cursed.*

*19 Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be cursed.*

*20 "The Lord himself will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in everything you do, until at last you are completely destroyed for doing evil and abandoning me.*

*21 The Lord will afflict you with diseases.*

*22 These disasters will pursue you until you die.*

*47 If you do not serve the Lord your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received,*

*48 you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you. You will be left hungry, thirsty, naked, and lacking in everything. The Lord will put an iron yoke on your neck, oppressing you harshly until he has destroyed you.*

*49 "The Lord will bring a distant nation against you from the end of the earth, and it will swoop down on you like a vulture. It is a nation whose language you do not understand,*

*50 a fierce and heartless nation that shows no respect for the old and no pity for the young.*

Even though this prophecy from Deuteronomy 28 was fulfilled by the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, that does not mean the prophecy ended. Prophecy can apply to more than one event, and if God promises or warns about something such as

He did here in Deuteronomy, it is very likely it will continue to apply to similar situations throughout history. It is most likely that these promises and warnings apply to Christians everywhere since the Church became the official designation for God's people after Christ's death and resurrection. Right now we would say that the curses God warned about are about to fall on the United States if we do not experience a revival nationwide that will turn us back to God. Just look around at the rampant materialism, the sexually laden content on television, the lack of respect for authority, or even for each other. Lewd songs fill the radios, TV, and MP3s. Violence is everywhere; consider the 10-year-old boy gunned down this past week in Chicago because he was caught in the crossfire between gangs. Television and video games extol violence. And to top that all off, we are taking God out of everything in our culture.

After becoming aware of those prophecies that God gave Moses, Jesus' words should not come as any surprise to us when we come to this passage in John, John 5:46, 47:

*46 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?"*

Did the Jewish people of the Old Testament have adequate warning of what would happen to them if they disobeyed? You bet they did. If you will recall, we began this discussion by asking "What on earth is the matter with the people of this world that prevents them from accepting the perfect Word of God?" The answer to that question is of course "sin." Wherever human beings are provided an opportunity to sin, they will often do so, even fully devoted **Christ-followers** who possess the Holy Spirit of God to help them in times of temptation can fall prey to enticements. Satan comes after such believers with a vengeance. He knows our greatest weaknesses and because he is the "Great Deceiver" he knows exactly which kinds of temptations are most likely to make a believer choose to sin. The one big difference, however, between those that have the Spirit of Christ living within them and those that do not, is that the Christ-follower has the free will to call upon the Holy Spirit for help or to willingly submit to the temptation. It is often a difficult tightrope to walk. But we have the choice between misery if we follow the temptation that we know is wrong, or the promise of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control if we choose to ask the Spirit to deliver us from temptation. That is probably why in the Lord's prayer, the Apostles' Prayer to be more exact, Jesus included: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

The Jews in John's day were no different from the Jews in Moses' day, nor were they any different from people today. The big distinction in this case, however, was that the Jews in John's day had been raised with the Word of God and should have known it thoroughly. Even people who claim to be Christians today have little knowledge of the Bible, supposing they even have one. If they do have one it usually develops a thick layer of dust.

I would venture to say that when most people read the Bible they do not get the message. There are some who can spend a lifetime reading passages from the Bible and never experience a life-changing experience. Then there are the people who read the Bible and say they simply cannot believe it. It all seems a little overwhelming, does it not?

With that overview let us return to John 5, beginning in verse 39 and see if we are able to find some answers:

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, (ESV)*

Thinking one can be saved by doing what they consider to be “good deeds” has been a curse on the human mind from the very beginning of time. It is fine to do good things, but doing good works does not get anyone a personal relationship with God or Christ or the Holy Spirit. That comes only through faith and trust in God in the Old Testament, and then through faith and trust in Christ after His death and resurrection in the New Testament. Here the Jews believed that reading the Scriptures was a good and holy thing and that just by reading them they would have eternal life. It is entirely possible that by thinking that way, they really did not pay attention to what the Scriptures were saying. They may well have read various passages and applied meanings that made them feel comfortable, as many people including pastors do today. They may never have really studied the Scriptures in order to understand what the passages were actually saying. I might ask the question: “*How many of you pick up your Bible in the morning or evening to read it because you know it is a good thing to do, but then read through it as fast as you can so you can get on to other things?*” Had these Jews truly understood their own Scriptures, they would have known that the prophets of the Old Testament spoke over and over again about the coming of Jesus and provided all kinds of predictions for them to recognize the true **Messiah** when He came.

Just reading the Scriptures does not provide eternal life. The Scriptures point the way to eternal life. If they did not read the Scriptures with an open mind seeking an understanding of God and His guidelines for living, then they would never find the security they thought they already had. You cannot be saved if you do not understand what the Bible has to say about salvation.

The Greek word in verse 39 that is translated “search” (ἔραυναō)² means exactly that. Many of the Jewish scribes spent a lifetime copying the texts word by word and had all kinds of checks and balances for double checking their work to make certain they did not make a single mistake. You may recall they did not have printing presses or copy machines in those days. Yet in spite of spending morning until night reading and copying the Word of God, they never got any deeper than the mechanical act of reading and copying. They stayed on the surface and never truly understood what God was telling them.

John 5:40 ESV:

*40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*

Can it be that these Jews to whom Jesus is speaking could not understand their own

<sup>2</sup> Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains* : Greek (New Testament). electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. GKG2236

Scripture, or could it be that like many other people they simply read the words without trying to understand the meaning? Or is it possible that they had made up so many of their own rules that they placed more emphasis on those than they did the actual Word of God? In spite of their knowledge of the Scriptures, they rejected Jesus.

Whatever their problem, Jesus asks them how they can read the Scripture and miss the point. The Scripture which tells them not once, not twice, not three times, but over a hundred times exactly when Jesus will come, what He will be like, what His purpose will be in coming, and that what He teaches will provide them with the only possible hope of eternal life in Heaven with God.

This would be like going to Las Vegas and finding a slot machine that paid a “jackpot” every time you put in a quarter, and you saying you would rather play another machine. How in the world could they be so foolish?

John 5:41-44 ESV:

*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?*

Jesus goes on to tell them that they do not glorify Him as the Messiah because He is not the kind of Messiah they were looking for. They wanted someone who would lead an uprising against the Romans and throw them out. They wanted a military conqueror that would restore Israel's position as a world power. They wanted someone who would bring them wealth and an opulent life-style, and all they got was someone who lived to serve and please God.

In addition Jesus tells them that He knows they do not have the love of God within them. If they did they would receive the Son with a spirit of love. Instead they focus on their own wants and desires and plot as to how they can get rid of God Himself, who has taken human form and come to earth to die for their sins. There can be no love in such selfish and evil behavior. What then did they love? They loved their own opinions about the Word of God. They wanted to receive glory from other scholars. And that wrong self-love kept them from loving God. People in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church treat Jesus in much the same way. Many ignore all the truth and proof that the Scripture offers of it being absolutely accurate so that they can make up a god that they can be comfortable with and to whom they do not have to be accountable. Most people do not truly love the Word of God, they just like to talk about it.

However, if some liberal religious figure comes along promoting all kinds of tolerant secular ideas, people will rush to him/her and jump on the bandwagon because it makes them feel all toasty inside. Secular historians provide evidence of a great many men who came forward claiming to be the Messiah and attracted many followers. They were able to gain followers primarily because they made offers to the people that satisfied their

desires. They offered political and material power, while Christ offered a cross. Jesus asks these Jews how they can possibly ignore the Holy God in favor of such false teaching that contradicts the spoken Word of God in the Old Testament; how can they turn to idols made of wood and stone? How can they glorify the worldly behavior and teachings of one another and push aside the one and only God who repeatedly has shown them so much love and patience? Well, Satan is far more clever than any human being and if one does not place their trust and faith in God, who will protect them? Satan will definitely get them. And this is exactly what will happen when the Antichrist appears on the world scene. Again it is up to individual choice.

John 5:45-47 ESV:

*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 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?"*

Jesus had come to the earth this time as a teacher and a Savior, not a judge, but Moses would certainly accuse them because the Law came through Moses. Anyone who has not accepted Christ as Savior will be judged by the Law. If someone rejects Christ they must keep all of the Law all of the time or they go to Hell. Jesus is the only way they can be seen by God as sinless, which in effect means that they have kept all of the Law through Christ.

The purpose of the Law of Moses was to show people what sin was and to let them know they could not keep all of the Law all of the time. It therefore made them aware of the need for a Savior. In other words, God gave the people His Law so that they could know that they were not able to please God on their own. The Law would make the people realize their need for a Savior. How would you know if you were breaking the law regarding speeding if there were no signs saying "Speed Limit 55 MPH," or have received a letter from the Secretary of State advising you of such a Law?

At the end of his life, Moses called the Levites together and delivered the Law to them. *"Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you"* (Deuteronomy 31:26). Moses was saying that the Law will always bear witness to our sins, that we are all sinners because we cannot keep it. Therefore we need someone who can keep all of it, who can be our Savior and pay the penalty for sin, for breaking God's Law. There is only One who can do that, a sinless Jesus. Because of His death for our sins we may have eternal life if, and only if, we believe in His work on the cross for our sins.

With all their knowledge of the Scripture the Pharisees should have responded to Jesus the same way that Phillip did in John 1:45 NAS, when Phillip recognized that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament predicted would come: *"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'"*



If they do not believe the things that God gave Moses to write down about the coming of Jesus, why would they believe someone who said He was the one who was promised? The Jews would not embrace the teaching of Moses that came from God. Thus they could not have the love of God in their hearts which would come from such teaching, and would have prepared them to love and accept Jesus for who He was.

The only love they had in their heart was for themselves and for the most part that is the same way people think today. So it becomes increasingly clear that the Jewish leaders were not going to accept Christ, requiring that Jesus take His message directly to the people. And that is exactly what He will do beginning in John chapter 6.

The witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the divine miracles, and the witness of the Word of God all unite to declare that Jesus Christ is indeed One with the Father and the very Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

So which side do you come down on? Does the Bible sit and gather dust on your shelf at home? Are you someone who reads the Bible occasionally and quickly? Or are you someone who reads it regularly and who strives to put it into practice? We should immerse ourselves in the Scriptures. They alone contain the directions for eternal life: life in heaven one day with Christ, and eternal life on earth lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. But we should not read the Bible just with the purpose of merely reading it, but also with the desire to truly understand it and allow it to change our lives. Form the habit of daily Bible reading. Read a verse or two and then meditate on it. Perhaps even memorize it. If the meaning is not clear, ask God to help you understand. If you see something in the verse that you have not made part of your life, ask God to help you do so. Remember that God desires, in fact he longs, to be in communication with you. Although He does not carry on an audible conversation with you, He does provide a means for such communication. You might want to imagine it as a two-way radio communication. He speaks to you through His Word in the Bible and allows you to speak to Him in prayer. If you want to know God, you will practice both of these communication skills daily.

You may also want to get into a Bible study in order to better understand the Word of God. Then beyond reading the Bible and understanding the meaning, take it one step farther. Put what you read and come to understand into practice in your daily life, as you do your job, as you interact with friends, co-workers, and family. When God says His people live and think a certain way, ask for His help to actually do that. When God says people who love Him avoid doing specific things, ask Him to help you be obedient and avoid them too.

If you are already a follower of Jesus Christ, having accepted Him as your Savior, you have the Holy Spirit of God living within you. He is another means by which God may speak to you. In a silent voice He will speak to your spirit planting thoughts in your mind concerning the things He would like you to do and feel. If you do these things on a daily basis, you will have the power to live a life filled with love, joy, peace, patience,

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 5:19

kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. These things are the fruit of the Spirit of God and can only be obtained by submitting your will to God's. No one can obtain them by self-control or self-improvement techniques. Self-help books are no substitute for the Word of God. These qualities are only obtainable as a gift, a gift of God's grace.

The Bible is one of God's great gifts to us. He did not put us here on earth and expect us to figure everything out on our own. He gave us a guide book, a love letter, and prophesies to help us on our journey through life. Are you making full use of your guide book?