

Jeff Whitebread
PO Box 123, Harrisburg, PA 17108
484-680-4260
Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

Who is It That's on Trial? *John 5:30-47*

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY 201st General Assembly

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.
- **WEDNESDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, and will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 5:30-47: “Who is It That’s on Trial?”

Have you ever been completely wrong about something? I have a vivid memory of this happening to me on one of my early dates with my wife Ishbell.

While on a double date, we stopped at a grocery store to purchase some food to prepare a meal together.

No one on the date had a vehicle and so we were all using public transportation. We stopped at a store close to my apartment and were carrying the groceries home. As we walked, Ishbell mentioned that the bags looked full and she thought they might break.

At this point plastic bags had just started being used in stores. I assured her the bags had been manufactured to withstand the amount of food that was placed in them. After all, the workers from the store packed the bags for us - and so, in my mind, there was no issue.

No sooner had these words come out of my mouth, then the over-packed bags broke, and the food spilled all over the ground. If you have ever seen the movie “Home Alone”, you can imagine the scene I am talking about.

My wife was, I am sure, smiling ear-to-ear. I chose not to look, for I was somewhat busy picking up our food off the ground. Now, before the bags broke, I was absolutely certain I was right and no one was going to tell me any different.

This is very much like the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They were thoroughly convinced of their understanding of God, making Jesus wrong. Nothing they heard or witnessed was able to penetrate their hearts, and so they approached Jesus from this skewed perspective.

Spectators or Participants

Often in John’s gospel, and especially in this account, we get the feeling that we are spectators in a court case. He seems to be continually writing

about ‘evidence’, which is sometimes translated, ‘testimony’ or ‘witness’. As Jesus continues to do and say things that were contrary to the Jews understanding of who God was and what He was like, we can’t help but feel that Jesus is on trial.

The problem is, as we shall see, those who are asking for evidence were not in a fit condition to understand what was being presented to them. What is really happening is that an alternative ‘trial’ is taking place. It is the people who are watching, listening, and then ignoring Jesus who are the ones on trial. Do they really want God’s involvement in their lives? And the utterly amazing thing is that God lets them choose.

You see, this is God’s provision for those who truly want no part of Him in their life. He approaches us in a way where we can, if we want, ignore him and seek to go our own way with no involvement from him, at least for a while.

Why Trust Jesus?

Here is the thing: anyone who seeks to interact with Jesus quickly discovers - he is a disruptive force. We just need to be flat out honest about this reality. His desire for us is to undergo the “full treatment” as C.S. Lewis reminds us. But often, we settle for that which is much harder; namely, just enough Jesus that makes us miserable. And so, while Jesus will not enter where he is not wanted, he will continue to gently seek access into our lives and relationships.

John 5:30: Jesus gives two reasons why we should trust him and allow him to reorder our broken existence. First, Jesus does nothing on his own. He judges, but only as he hears from the Father. He only does what the Father says. It may be helpful for us to understand that judging has a larger meaning than that of being an arbiter of a specific matter; the biblical understanding is one of ruling. For example, in the book of Judges, we are told of those who had responsibility for the people between the time of Joshua and that of the monarchy under King Saul. Jesus’ judgment was his ability to rule in a just manner, and this was possible because he did nothing on his own. He did not leave his judgment to his own human impulses, but perfectly reflected God’s mind, character, and purposes.

The other reason we can trust Jesus with our lives is because he seeks not to please himself, but he does the will of him who sent him, his Father who is in heaven. As we learn from the Lord’s prayer, the kingdom of God exists wherever God’s will is done; even earth, since we continue to pray for its reality to come. The kingdom then is God’s ruling, and so, in Jesus, we see the kingdom of God. We are witnessing how God’s will can be done on earth just like it is done in heaven. This then becomes instructive for those who would seek to honor God with their lives.

Who is It That's on Trial? (cont'd) - *John 5:30-47*

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They too can step into God's kingdom, right here and right now, as they seek to do all things, whether word or deed, just as Jesus himself would do them (Col 3:17). They have been granted tremendous access to God, through confidence in Jesus and by becoming his apprentices. In this, his disciples claim for him those areas in their lives which are increasingly governed not by their will, but by the will of God. This is what Jesus was offering his audience of that day through believing him, and it is what he is offering to us here and now.

When we look at the quality and character of Jesus' life, we are compelled to trust him. His life is the capstone to God's story of redemption. For this reason, Jesus is able to point to the witness of others that also speak to the validity of His words and deeds.

John's Testimony

John 5:33 - For Jesus, the witness of John the Baptizer gave him a place to stand in the world and begin his work. John was recognized as an Old Testament prophet and testifies to the fact that Jesus was "*the Lamb of God*" through the effects of his ministry. In this we are reminded once again of the consideration in God's approach toward us, even for those who might choose to oppose him. John's testimony was given in order that those listening might be provided every opportunity to believe him, and "*may be saved*," that they too might cross over from death and step into the life that Jesus brings, this life of interaction with God.

John 5:35 - Jesus says, John was a "*shining lamp*," he lit the way to Christ. His message caused many to reconsider the direction of their life and clear any disorder, so nothing might hinder this wonderful opportunity that awaited them. He was the first in this revival that was sweeping through the lands, and those Jews, who now had a problem with Jesus, enjoyed the light that came from John's ministry. Yet, as Jesus begins to be disruptive to their religious system and their control over the people, they no longer accepted the testimony that John spoke concerning Him.

The Father's Testimony

John 5:36 - The witness of John is one thing, but the witness of God is something completely different. The miraculous work of Jesus testifies to the fact that the Father had sent him. And if the Father sent him, then all that Jesus does and says is a reflection of God and his intentions. Jesus is saying, we cannot pick and choose the parts of his life and ministry that we find comfortable and disregard the rest that may touch to close to home. The practicality of this for those Jews was in the healing of the paralyzed man on the Sabbath. Is it possible that Jesus is right about this too?

John 5:38: This statement from Jesus, "*you do not have his word abiding in your hearts*" raises an important question: how is it possible for these religious leaders, those who have interacted with the Scripture, to not have God's

word abiding in their hearts? The word of God, when no further qualification is added, is God's speaking, his communicating. When God speaks, he is expressing his thoughts, intentions and character. To have God's word abiding in people's hearts, they must become those who think God's thoughts after him, those who seek to live out God's intentions as revealed by the life of Jesus, and to become those who are developing the very character of God, those who naturally and easily do the things that we find Jesus doing – like lending aid on the Sabbath to one who is crippled. The reason the religious leaders missed Jesus was very simple; they had something other than God's word dwelling in them.

The Testimony of the Scripture

John 5:39 – The testimony of the Scriptures is not found in abstract truth, but in relationship with the living God. As Jesus says, it is by coming to him, "*that we may receive life*." We learn from this passage that it is possible to possess much information about the Scriptures and not have God's word abiding in the heart. This truth may be especially important for our information oriented culture, and causes us to ask a simple question: what do we really want from our study of the Scriptures? Have we pursued information about God as a substitute for interaction with Him? It must be more than getting an "A" on God's theology exam, or becoming those who have mastered the Bible. Without question, we must step into a thorough, intelligent, and rigorous study of the Scripture but with a different purpose: that of leading us to be mastered by God. It is studying so that our whole life might be transformed by the increasing reality of God's word dwelling in us. The acid test, according to Jesus, is this: is God's way of loving transforming our heart and shaping our whole life?

John 5:44 – The great danger to believing, according to Jesus, is a focus on seeking the approval of others, instead of the approval that comes from God. For the Jews, fitting into their religious system controlled them; it limited them from stepping into a life of interaction with Jesus because it would disrupt what their life was built upon. To believe Jesus means realigning our life to his understanding of God and the way the world works. We cannot worship two masters. As Jesus examines our life, his question remains: how fully will we build our lives on him? Is a little of Jesus enough for us, or dare we follow him, learn from him, place our confidence in him, and find the safest place is to be with him in all things?

Book referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

Legislator Bible study: Tuesday (Session), at 8 AM,
Room 203 - Ryan Office Building
Open-To-All Bible Study: Wednesday (Session), at 1
PM, Room 203 - Ryan Office Building