

The Witness's Testimony

Dear Friends,

The more a preacher gets self out of the way the more effectively he is able to preach Jesus Christ and not a compromise message. John serves as a powerful example of faithful and consistent ministry that rejected every suggestion at redirecting the focus of his ministry to himself. “My role in the church,” “My ministry,” or similar terms betray far too much of the “It is all about me” attitude in a preacher. The wise and faithful minister will maintain a servant’s heart and will steadfastly keep the emphasis of his ministry on the Lord Jesus Christ. Over some fifty years of ministry I have observed a few folks along the way, both ministers and non-ministers, who thought of themselves as having all the right answers, not only for their own life, but also for everyone else. In various ways they will attempt to manipulate and control others to their end. Often they will sanitize this rather arrogant attitude with “But I’m doing it all for their good.” If someone under their influence follows their lead and succeeds, watch this person. They will overflow with self-congratulation at their success. No where in Scripture are true servants of God instructed—either by word or by Biblical example—to follow this example. Biblical preaching and leadership fills one and only one model, the role and heart of the servant. The message of the gospel and its profound impact on human lives is far more significant than mind games that contemptibly disrespect and orchestrate others to our own wills and ways. In this week’s study John’s message demonstrates the heart and message of the servant who faithfully keeps the spotlight focused where it belongs, on the Lord Jesus Christ and His work. For a number of years in my secular career I served in a governmental business role. By law everything that was officially done had to be done in public and shared with the public. Thus news reporters assigned to our agency rightly had access to most of the documents and activities that were part of our business activity. During that time I observed two distinct types of news reporters. One reporter doggedly sought to understand the business that we conducted and to report it as accurately as possible to the public on the pages of his newspaper. The other kind of reporter showed few scruples in his efforts to fabricate information so as to advance his personal career and position as a reporter. I offer that preachers—and non-preacher Christians as well—may also fall into similar categories. “We preach not ourselves...” dictates the role of the faithful minister of the gospel. Only as the preacher—or the non-preacher who preaches with his/her feet from the pulpit of life rather than from the pulpit in the church—who honors this Biblical mandate will be able to fulfill the remainder of this verse, “...Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Have you ever watched a young child in a room full of new toys? The child wants to play with all of the toys at one time, so he/she will try to grab all of them at once. As the hands fill up, the effort to add another toy results in one of the toys-in-hand falling out of the child’s hands. The observation becomes rather comical. However, when you observe an adult professing Christian trying to hold onto all the trappings of self, while also trying to hold onto a credible profession of Christianity, the observation loses its comical flavor and becomes pathetic. What a powerful lesson for all of us! We need to empty our hands—and lives—of self so that we will be able to hold onto the Lord Jesus Christ and minister His blessings to others. May we live with hands less full of self and more in touch with Him, Joe Holder

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There was a man sent from God, whose name was John The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. ([Joh 1:6-9](#)) When I attended college and studied the various communications courses, the strong emphasis of the course required that the writer be a good witness, but to keep self in the background-or

entirely out of the story. Over the ensuing years it appears that news media philosophy has almost wholly reversed this idea, rewarding news reporters who manage to make themselves the center of the news story. Similarly when a person is called as a witness in a court, he is expected to testify to facts that he personally observed and knows, not make himself the centerpiece of the case. When a preacher, either by ego or by faulty theology, makes himself the centerpiece of his ministry-or allows himself to become such-he has failed to honor his calling. "We preach not ourselves..." is the defining characteristic of every minister who fulfills his calling and ministry ([2Co 4:5](#)). Unless a man overcomes this hurdle, he will never effectively accomplish the remainder of this verse in his ministry, "...but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The objective of a news reporter or of a witness in a trial is to present credible and accurate information with evidence to the facts that he reports. The stated objective of John's ministry in this passage is "...to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe." The point is simple and straightforward. John came as a witness. His objective was to present credible testimony to the Light, the Lord Jesus Christ coming as God Incarnate. Thus we should conclude that what he said about Jesus was true. What was John's testimony? We have a summary of it in the verses that follow our study passage. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. ([Joh 1:15-18](#)) Scholars differ as to the extent of John's testimony and the Apostle John's commentary. Does John's testimony end with the simple one sentence commentary? "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me." Does it continue to the end of the eighteenth verse, or does it end at some point between the two? Since the Apostle John wrote by inspiration, it is theologically irrelevant to our study. Both men gave testimony to the same truth; both men spoke/wrote the truth about Jesus. What is the conclusion of John's testimony?

1. Jesus, son of Mary, born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, is the Messiah of whom the ancient Jewish prophets wrote.
2. 3. Jesus, the Messiah, is more important than his advance guard who announced His coming. John's gospel message was not "all about" John. It was all about the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. 5. The benefit of His coming was not limited to first century Jewish worshippers who lived in the holy land at the time of his life. His coming opened the fountain of God's blessings to His people throughout all ages, lands, and cultures. The blessings that flow from Him are described as "grace for grace," or as one grace heaped up on another grace, a prolific abundance of grace.
6. 7. Jesus Messiah is not equal to Moses; He is infinitely superior to him! God used Moses to announce His law and covenant with His people Israel. Jesus came directly from God and lived and spoke as God in human flesh. The result of His coming was not another law, but "grace and truth."
8. 9. In fact He alone has truly "seen" God in all of His splendor and holiness. Not only did He see God, but He also came to bring God's image (moral and spiritual image) and message to His people.
10. 11. Not only was He Mary's son, He was also God's Son (unique and one-the one and only). He came not only as Messiah in fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecies, but He also came as God manifest in human flesh.
12. 13. In His coming He "declared" God. That is, He spelled out the essence of God to His people. We sometimes, in grave error to the message of Scripture, depict God as an angry vengeful tyrant and Jesus as the infinite pacifier of the angry Father. Never! If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at His Son in the Incarnation. The Greek word translated "declared" in this verse is the Greek root for the English word "exegete." An exegete is someone who studies a document (or in this case a

Person, the very Person of God) until he knows it backward and forward. Then in simple terms that people who are not familiar with the text can understand he explains the message of the text (or the person). He translates the inscrutable into the understandable. This lesson specifically states that Jesus' Incarnation is the exegesis of God to us. When you read in the gospels of Jesus' tenderness to rather dim disciples-sometimes to hungry, but rather ignorant people-do not overlook the incredible truth that John teaches us in this lesson. When you read of Jesus' tenderness, you are seeing the very heart of God! Ah, do not overlook the other equally significant truth. When you read of Jesus' intense anger at religious hypocrites, His burning anger at the arrogant elitist Pharisees, and at wicked non-religious people, you are also seeing in these episodes the very heart of God toward sin.

14. John's message came from God with a concise intent. He came to add credible testimony to the Person and life of Jesus, God Incarnate. When you read the New Testament account of John, imagine him sitting in the witness chair during a court trial. "John, tell us what you personally know about this man Jesus." Then listen to his testimony. Often critics of Christianity will object that many people have died for false religions, so neither John's death nor the death of any other Christian distinguishes Christianity from any other religion. They conveniently ignore one major distinction. The people who die for false religions lived generations or centuries after the false religion was started, and they believed the lies on which the false religion was based. John and the other first century Christians who died for their faith in Jesus did not live centuries after Jesus' life. They were eyewitnesses to His life and teachings. They were convinced of His deity based on personal observation, not on false second-hand testimony. If you will, imagine attending the funeral of a dear personal friend who was killed in a tragic automobile accident. A few days later you are walking from the grocery store to your automobile in the parking lot. You see the silhouette of a person a few yards from you that reminds you of your recently deceased friend. It brings back a flood of pleasant memories. You pause momentarily and relish the fond memories. Now think about something. How would you react if that person made eye contact with you, walked over to you, shook your hand, and gave you a warm affectionate hug? It is your friend! He calls you by name. He rehearses old personal memories with you that only you and he would know. How would you react? If you tried to convince others who didn't meet your friend in the parking lot, how would they react? What would it take for them to believe that your friend had actually arisen and returned from the grave? They'd have to see him too, right? You see, this is precisely the record we have in the New Testament regarding the resurrection of Jesus. The amazing-and blessed-truth of this scenario in the case of John is this. He believed in Jesus' deity so strongly that he suffered martyrdom before Jesus was crucified and arose from the dead! Having considered the record of John's life and death, having listened to John on the witness stand, I ask you the question. Do you believe his testimony? Do you believe that Jesus is God Incarnate, dead, buried, and victoriously arisen? I do!

Elder Joe Holder