THE QUESTION

What did Jesus mean when he said his witness about himself was not true (John 5:31)?

Asked by a THF member on April 14, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 86 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-jesus-mean-when-he-said-his-witness-about-himself-was-not-true

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Jesus did not mean his words were false. He meant his witness did not stand alone: the Father, his works and John also bore witness to him. Cyprian reads this as Jesus choosing the Father's testimony over his own, and Tertullian links it to the law's rule that two witnesses are needed.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith’s library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Jesus points at once to another witness

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tatian's gospel harmony, the saying is followed right away by Jesus naming another witness. He adds that his works, given by the Father, also show that the Father sent him. His own word is not left standing alone.

1

“There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the witness he bears about me is true.”

later in the same passage

“But I have a witness greater than John's: the works that my Father has given me to complete, the very works that I do, bear witness about me, that the Father has sent me.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 22 (c. 150–180 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Cyprian: Jesus chose the Father's testimony

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian explains that people tend to speak in their own favor, so a witness about oneself is weak. He says the Lord was not willing to rest on his own word, and he uses this to teach that Christ's servants should also look to God's testimony.

2

“The Lord Himself teaches this and says that testimony is not true when someone appears as a witness about himself, because each person would naturally favor himself.”

later in the same passage

“But if the Lord Himself, who will soon judge all things, was unwilling to be believed on His own testimony, and instead chose to be approved by the judgment and testimony of God the Father, how much more should His servants observe this.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

The law asked for two witnesses

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian notes that Jesus quoted the law about two witnesses and named the Father as the second one. A church order applies the same rule in church courts: one person's word, even a good person's, is not enough by itself.

3 “Now if He were one, being at once both the Son and the Father, He certainly would not have quoted the sanction of the law, which requires not the testimony of one, but of two.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Praxeas* 22 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 4, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “Yet even if he has a good conscience, do not believe him alone, for that is contrary to the law.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Elsewhere Jesus says his witness is true

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

In John 8 Jesus says his witness about himself is true because he knows where he came from. Novatian quotes this line to show Christ came from heaven. Read together, John 5:31 is about a witness standing alone, not about Jesus speaking falsely.

5 “If I bear witness to myself, my witness is true. For I know from where I came and where I go.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 35 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “Notice also that He says He will return there, to the place He testifies He came from before, as one sent, that is, from heaven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 15 (c. 240–258 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 7

Tertullian uses the verse as a rule

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Arguing with heretics who leaned on Paul's own claims, Tertullian says self-report is not enough for a careful believer. He points to this verse: even the Lord did not rest on his own witness.

7 "Still, this is not enough for anyone who examines before he believes, since even the Lord Himself did not bear witness of Himself"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prescription Against Heretics* 23 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 6 OF 7

Christ received witness from every side

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Irenaeus lists many who bore witness to Christ, from the Father and the Spirit to his enemies and even death. This fits the idea that Christ's claims are backed by testimony beyond his own words.

8 "He received testimony from all: the Father, the Spirit, angels, creation, men, fallen spirits, demons, the enemy, and finally, from death itself, confirming that He was truly man and truly God."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 3, page 5 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 7 OF 7

Humble people let others speak for them

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Clement of Rome does not quote John 5:31, but he gives a similar rule for Christian life. A humble person does not promote himself but lets others bear witness.

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9 “Let the humble not testify about himself, but allow others to bear witness to him.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians*
THF's updated English

Source 12, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give a full verse-by-verse commentary on John 5.
- They do not explain in detail how John 5:31 and John 8:14 fit together; that link is our reading.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 12 early Christian passages and 86 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–50, in Bible order), then 48 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *12 passages from 8 writers*

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Diatessaron* 35 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “witness is not true. John 8:14 Jesus 25 answered and said to them, If I bear witness to myself, my witness is true… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Diatessaron* 22 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “5:31 I bear witness 40 of myself, and so my witness is not true… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 3*

3 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 8, page 4** “from all, including both those who embrace it as friends and those who oppose it as enemies. For true evidence cannot be denied, even when it compels adversaries to provide… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Against Praxeas* 22 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “after citing the law when it affirms the truth of two men's testimony, He adds at once: I am one who am bearing witness of myself… [continues online] **read ›**

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5 *On Prescription Against Heretics* 23 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "they should show, from the circumstance which they allege of Peter's being rebuked by Paul, that Paul added yet another form of the gospel besides that which Peter and… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Against Celsus* 48 (1885 English) "on that account said, If I speak of Myself, My witness is not true… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Commentary on John* 2 we have gone through all this when the verse before us is, "He came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light." But it was necessary to give… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 26 (on point 3) "bear witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 15 **Quote 6, page 3** "Christ is only man, how is it that He says, "Though I… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 10*

10 *Epistles* **Quote 2, page 2** "there is another who bears witness of me… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 11*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "the testimony of such persons is firm on account of their character, and true on account of their mode of life… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 12*

12 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "the humble not bear testimony to himself, but leave witness to be borne to him by another… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *38 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **Genesis 31:44** Now then, come, let me make a covenant, I and you, and it shall be for a witness between me and you." And he said to him, "Behold, there is no one with us; see, God is witness between me and you." **read ›**

14 **Leviticus 5:1** If a person sins, and hears the voice of an oath, and he is a witness, having either seen or known of it, if he does not report it, he shall bear the sin. **read ›**

15 **Numbers 16:28** And Moses said, "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it is not of myself. **read ›**

16 **Deuteronomy 18:15** The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers; him you shall hear, **read ›**

17 **Deuteronomy 19:15** One witness shall not stand to testify against a man for any unrighteousness, or for any offense, or for any sin that he commits. At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses every word shall stand. **read ›**

18 **Deuteronomy 19:16** And if an unjust witness rises up against a man, accusing him of ungodliness, **read ›**

19 **Deuteronomy 31:21** And this song shall stand against them face to face as a witness, for it shall never be forgotten from their mouth or from the mouth of their seed. For I know their wickedness, all that they are doing here today, before I have brought them into the good land that I swore to their fathers." **read ›**

20 **1 Samuel 12:3** Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose calf have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken? Whom of you have I oppressed, or whom have I crushed? Or from whose hand have I taken a ransom and a sandal? Testify against me, and I will repay you." **read ›**

21 **Proverbs 14:25** A faithful witness will rescue a soul from evils, but a deceitful man kindles falsehoods. **read ›**

22 **Jeremiah 7:4** Do not trust in yourselves with lying words, saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord it is"; for they will not help you at all. **read ›**

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23 **Jeremiah 26:12** And Jeremiah spoke to the rulers and to all the people, saying, “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. (Septuagint Jeremiah 33:12 (Jeremiah 26:12 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

24 **Jeremiah 34:11** and let them be servants and maidservants. (Septuagint Jeremiah 41:11 (Jeremiah 34:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

25 **Ezekiel 13:18** and you shall say: Thus says the Lord: Woe to the women who sew pillows under every elbow of the hand, and make coverings for every head of every age, to turn souls aside! The souls of my people were turned aside, and they kept souls alive for themselves. **read ›**

26 **Ezekiel 16:8** And I passed through by you and saw you; and behold, it was your time, and a time of those who lodge; and I spread my wings over you and covered your nakedness, and I swore to you; and I entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord, and you became mine. **read ›**

27 **Ezekiel 16:19** And my bread that I gave you — with fine flour and oil and honey I fed you — you also set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, says the Lord. **read ›**

28 **Ezekiel 23:7** And she gave her prostitution to them, all of them choice sons of the Assyrians; and she defiled herself with all after whom she lusted, in all their imaginations. **read ›**

29 **Ezekiel 24:25** And you, Son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their strength, the pride of their boasting, the desires of their eyes, and the pride of their soul, their sons and their daughters, **read ›**

30 **Wisdom of Solomon 17:11** For evil, when condemned, bears particularly cowardly witness, and, hemmed in by conscience, it always assumes the worst. **read ›**

31 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:20** A crooked heart will give sorrow, but a man of much experience will repay him. (Septuagint Wisdom of Sirach 36:25 (Wisdom of Sirach 36:20 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

32 **Susanna 1:21** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

33 **Susanna 1:43** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

34 **4 Maccabees 12:16** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

35 **4 Maccabees 12:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

36 **1 Enoch 89:77** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

37 **1 Enoch 104:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

38 **John 1:34** And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” **read ›**

39 **John 5:30** I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me. **read ›**

40 **John 5:31** If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. **read ›**

41 **John 5:32** There is another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony he gives about me is true. **read ›**

42 **John 5:36** But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father gave me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify about me, that the Father has sent me. **read ›**

43 **John 8:14** Jesus answered them, “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from, and where I am going; but you do not know where I came from, or where I am going. **read ›**

44 **John 8:18** I am one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me.” **read ›**

45 **John 19:35** He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, that you may believe. **read ›**

46 **Acts 8:2** Devout men buried Stephen and lamented greatly over him. **read ›**

47 **Romans 9:23** and did so to make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory— **read ›**

48 **Colossians 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind through evil deeds, he has now reconciled **read ›**

49 **1 John 5:10** He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. **read ›**

50 **3 John 1:12** Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself. We also testify, and you know that our testimony is true. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *48 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Jeremiah 1:9

Matthew 6:11 · 8:3 · 11:14 · 16:16 · 16:17 · 17:9

John 1:1 · 1:3 · 1:8 · 1:32 · 1:51 · 6:38 · 8:16 · 8:17 · 8:26 · 8:28 · 8:41 · 8:51 · 8:54 · 8:56 · 8:58 · 9:4 · 10:15 · 10:24 · 10:27 · 10:30 · 10:31 · 10:32 · 10:35 · 10:38 · 11:12 · 12:20 · 14:7 · 14:28 · 18:3 · 20:17

Acts 10:15

Romans 3:3

1 Corinthians 4:17 · 12:26

2 Corinthians 2:15 · 12:2

Galatians 1:13 · 1:18 · 2:9 · 4:16

1 John 1:1

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did Jesus mean when he said his witness about himself was not true (John 5:31)?” on April 14, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY