

John 5:31 (R B.) 52999

Christian Truth: Volume 18, Comparison Between Two Verses: John 5:31 and 8:14 (5:31)

The hasty reader might think there was a contradiction between these two statements, and the pious reader might be perplexed; for they seem at the first blush to contradict one another. In John 5 the Lord disclaims bearing witness of Himself; in John 8 He insists on His divine right to do so. Indeed the language, in both passages, is the strongest possible. "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true," says our Lord in John 5. "Though I bear witness of Myself, yet is My witness true"; thus run the words in chapter 8. "Record" in the A.V. of the latter passage is really the same Greek word for "record" in the original.

Now one can imagine cavilers objecting; at least if the two statements were found in two different gospels, they might say that such contradiction was natural, and to be expected from conflicting minds. But not so. Both statements are found in the fourth Gospel. Needless to say, they are both profoundly true. Clearly also forgers would not require excessive caution to avoid such an apparent discrepancy, for they naturally fear an exposure of their subterfuge. And the truth!—what has it to fear? Nay, ours should be the care to heed that Word which is indeed as much God's as if orally heard from heaven.

What then is the solution of the seeming discrepancy? It seems this: In John 5 He speaks not only as Son but as become flesh, and doeth nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father doing. Our Lord's argument is that if He were the only one to bear witness of Himself, His witness would not be true. He thus graciously, though searchingly, meets the contention of the Jews that if a man bear witness of himself, his witness could not be true. Two witnesses there must be, three were better, more than adequate, according to Jewish law. So Christ says, "If I [alone] bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." It could not be that His should be the solitary testimony concerning Himself. He had first John the Baptist bearing Him witness; next, the testimony of the works given Him to do; and third, that of the Father's voice. It was superabundant. If only on their one technical ground the Jews were bound to heed it.

Nay, there were the Scriptures likewise. Such is the force of the passage in John 5. He is the perfect and dependent Man, who referred His adversaries to the fourfold witness of John His herald, His own works, the Father's witness, and the Scriptures. Yet is He "Light of the world," "the Truth," "the Son," the "I am" (John 8). So, far from there being discrepancy in the statements of one and the same Evangelist, there is the most absolute agreement between him who wrote mainly for the Jews (Matthew) and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John). He who said, "I am the light of the world," could also say, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father." Such a One only could be so great a light. A mere man would becomingly shrink from bearing testimony concerning himself. He who, when Thomas addressed Him as "My Lord and my God," accepted the homage, might indeed say, "Though I bear record of Myself, yet is My record true." Even here He adds, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me." If two men were to be believed, how much more the witness of the Son and of the Father?

So it is with all Scripture. What seems at first a difficulty, a discrepancy, to our imperfect vision, is ever found to be fraught with some blessed meaning that had hitherto escaped us. The Holy Spirit alone can illuminate; but He does teach those who are subject to the written Word, surely not apart from it.