

Was Jesus Trustworthy?

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When Christ spoke to a group of hostile Jews in Jerusalem regarding God the Father and His own equality with Him (John 5:17-30; cf. 10:30), He defended His deity by pointing to several witnesses, including John the Baptist, the Father in heaven, and the Scriptures (5:33-47). One statement that has confused some Bible readers concerning Jesus' defense of His deity is found in John 5:31. Jesus began this part of His discourse by saying, "If I bear witness of Myself, **My witness is not true**" (emp. added). According to many Bible critics, this declaration blatantly contradicts the following statement that He made on another occasion when speaking to the Pharisees. Christ said: "Even if I bear witness of Myself, **My witness is true**" (John 8:14, emp. added). How could He say that His witness was both true, and not true, without being contradictory?

By way of an answer, consider the following illustration. An innocent man on trial for murder is judged to be guilty by the jury, even after proclaiming his innocence. (Someone had framed the defendant for the murder, and all of the evidence the jury heard pointed to the defendant as the offender.) When leaving the court house, if the man who was wrongly convicted is asked by a newspaper reporter, "Are you guilty?," and he responds by saying, "If the court says I'm guilty, I'm guilty," has the man lied? Even though the statements, "I am guilty," and "I am not guilty," are totally different, they may not be contradictory, depending on the time and sense in which they are spoken. After the trial, the wrongly accused defendant simply repeated the jury's verdict. He said, "I am guilty," and meant, "The court has found me guilty."

When Jesus conceded to the Jews the fact that His witness was "not true," He was not confessing to being a liar. Rather, Jesus was reacting to a well-known law of His day. In Greek, Roman, and Jewish law, the testimony of a witness could not be received in his own case (see Robertson, 1997). "Witness to anyone must always be borne by someone else" (Morris, 1995, p. 287). The Law of Moses declared: "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15; cf. Matthew 18:15-17). The Pharisees understood this law well, as is evident by their statement to Jesus: "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true" (John 8:13). In John 5:31, "Jesus points to the impossibility of anyone's being accepted on the basis of his own word.... He is asserting that if of himself he

were to bear witness to himself, that would make it untrue" in a court of law (Morris, p. 287). If Jesus had no evidence in a trial regarding His deity other than His own testimony about Himself, His testimony would be inconclusive. Jesus understood that His audience had a right to expect more evidence than just His word. Similar to the illustration given earlier where an innocent person accepts the guilty verdict of the jury as final, Jesus said, "My witness is not true," and meant that, in accordance with the law, His own testimony apart from other witnesses would be considered invalid (or insufficient to establish truth).

But why is it that Jesus said to the Pharisees at a later time that His "witness is true" (John 8:14)? The difference is that, in this instance, Jesus was stressing the fact that **His words** were true. Even if in a court of law two witnesses are required for a fact to be established (a law Jesus enunciated in verse 17), that law does not negate the fact that Jesus was telling the truth, just as it did not negate the fact that the wrongly accused man mentioned above was telling the truth during his trial. Jesus declared His testimony to be true for the simple reason that His testimony revealed the true facts regarding Himself (Lenski, 1961, p. 599). He then followed this pronouncement of truth with the fact that there was another witness—the Father in heaven Who sent Him to Earth (8:16-18). Thus, in actuality, His testimony was true in two senses: (1) it was true because it was indeed factual; and (2) it was valid because it was corroborated by a second unimpeachable witness—God.

God the Father (John 8:18; 5:37-38), along with John the Baptist (John 5:33), the miracles of Jesus (5:36), the Scriptures (5:39), and specifically the writings of Moses (5:46), all authenticated the true statements Jesus made regarding His deity. Sadly, many of His listeners rejected the evidence then, just as people reject it today.

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Q Does it take millions of years to petrify wood?

A Petrified wood intrigues both old and young alike. Finding a rock in the exact shape and pattern as wood brings to mind several curious questions. When did this happen? How long did it take? What caused this situation? While these (and other) questions about petrified wood are interesting, the question that pertains to the creation/evolution debate centers on how long the process takes. Those who believe in an old Earth suggest that wood petrifies over millions of years. A “fact sheet” on petrified wood found in South Dakota has this to say about the situation: “The final condition, necessary for petrification, is time. The mineral replacement process is very slow, probably taking millions of years” (Teachout, 1995).

The idea that it takes millions of years for wood to petrify, however, is patently false. As is usually the case with such geological phenomena, the actual process has very little to do with the amount of **time** available, but instead demands the right **conditions**.

Andrew Snelling has documented several instances—in the laboratory and in nature—in which wood was petrified in just a few months or years (Snelling, 1995). He also discussed the

fact that Hamilton Hicks was granted a U.S. patent in 1986 for a chemical “cocktail” that can produce wood that “evidently has all the characteristics of petrified wood, including its appearance” (1995).

John Morris commented that “no informed geologist would say it takes an excessively long time” for wood to petrify. He documented one field experiment in which a block of wood was placed in an alkaline spring for a year, after which, “substantial petrification had occurred” (2004).

It does not take thousands or millions of years to petrify wood, and arguments that suggest such cannot be used to bolster the fallacious idea of an old Earth. Wood can petrify quite rapidly—a situation that certainly fits nicely into the young Earth model.

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IN THE NEWS

Beverage alcohol. How many times have individuals been quick to point out the “positive effects” supposedly associated with “social drinking?” Yet, according to a new report, the negative aspects far outweigh any positive benefits. An article in the April 8, 2004 issue of *Nature* noted: “We pay too much attention to the health benefits of alcohol, and neglect the devastating effects of excessive consumption. Compared with the tobacco industry, the companies that provide us with wine, beer and spirits have a glowing reputation” (“Some Sobering...,” 2004, 428:587). The editorial went on to report:

One popular refrain for the drinks industry is that in moderation, alcohol can improve health....But you’re unlikely to have heard industry representatives explaining that the beneficial effects of moderate drinking are limited to a relatively small proportion of the population. Many of the rest of us, lulled into thinking that our “social” consumption of alcohol is good for us, are literally drinking ourselves to death (“Some Sobering...,” p. 587).

Helen Pearson laid bare the truth regarding beverage alcohol when she asserted:

“Alcohol and tobacco are the terrible twins of public health. Both increase the risk of cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Both are promoted aggressively by a powerful industry. And both can be horribly addictive” (2004, 428:598).

The truth, as Ms. Pearson admitted, is that: “According to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO), **the harm caused by alcohol nearly equals that from smoking**” (p. 598, emp. added).

The powerful alcohol industry has been so successful at selling the “beneficial message” that many assumed alcohol not only was acceptable, but also improved health. “Plenty of people use this message [drinking in moderation] as an excuse to drink more alcohol,” argues Ira Goldberg, professor of preventive medicine at Columbia University in New York” (Pearson, p. 599). Maybe now some of the media’s disproportionate attention will focus on the harmful effects of alcohol.

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- Pearson, Helen (2004), “The Demon Drink,” *Nature*, 428:598-600, April 8.
- “Some Sobering Thoughts” (2004), *Nature*, 428: 587, April 8.

Brad Harrub

RESOURCES