

## THE WITNESS OF GOD

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Relativists say there is no absolute truth. Of course, they believe this assertion to be absolutely true. Others believe that there is absolute truth, but they do allow that in some instances it is difficult to know what is true. Consider the case of Hiroo Onoda. In the Second World War, Hiroo Onoda was an intelligence officer in the Imperial Japanese Army. On the Twenty-sixth day of December, in the Year of Our Lord Nineteen-hundred Forty-four, Onoda's commanding officer sent him to Lubang Island in the Philippines, which were occupied by the Japanese. Onoda had orders to prevent the enemy from taking possession of the island, and he was forbidden to surrender, or to commit suicide. In the month of August in the following year, Japan surrendered to the United States. Onoda and his three men did not know the war had ended, and they carried on with their guerrilla campaign against the Filipinos. In the month of October, Onoda and his comrades came across a leaflet, printed by some Filipinos, and the leaflet stated, "The war ended on August 15. Come down from the mountains!" Onoda and his men believed it to be propaganda, and disregarded it. Later in the year, Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita signed an order of surrender, and copies were dropped by plane on Lubang Island. Onoda and his men concluded the order was a fake, and they continued fighting. Five years later, one of the four surrendered. Two years after that, pictures of the men's families, and letters from them urging the men to surrender, were dropped on the island, but the men believed it to be another trick. After the passing of two years, one of the men was killed by police, and eighteen years after that, another was killed. Onoda was left alone. Twenty-nine years after the end of the war, Onoda's commanding officer, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, then retired from military service, met with Lieutenant Onoda face to face, and relieved him of duty. Onoda finally surrendered. When Major Taniguchi relieved Lieutenant Onoda of his duty, the Lieutenant was, from his own point of view, not skeptical enough. How did he know the major was not a prisoner of the Americans, and forced to relieve Onoda? Or, how did he know that the major himself was not duped by the Americans? From another point of view, however, it would have been more reasonable for Onoda to have surrendered long before. It seems he was too stubborn to admit that the Empire of Japan had been defeated. This story is a fascinating case study in the theory of knowledge, especially on the matter of testimony. Some people are trustworthy, but some are not. Some people tell lies. How can one know when another does not speak the truth? This is a problem with respect to men, but not with respect to God. God is absolutely trustworthy, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is absolutely true. The Gospel is absolutely true, and men can know it to be so.

God promised to King David and heir who would forever sit on his throne. He said to him:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16; cf. Psalm 132:11)

For many generations, the children of Israel expected this anointed king, this Christ. Simeon patiently waited for the Christ, and God revealed to him that he would not die before he saw Him. (Luke 2:25, 26) After Jesus called Philip to be His disciple, Philip said to Nathaniel, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45) The woman at the well said to Jesus, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ." (John 4:25)

When John the Baptist came preaching, some thought he may be the Christ. Saint John writes, "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not."

(John 3:15) John the Baptist said he was not the Christ, but that he was sent by God to prepare the way for Him. (John 1:24-27; 3:15-17)

Jesus, in the beginning of His earthly ministry, performed great miracles. At Cana of Galilee He performed His first miracle. He turned water into wine, and so manifested His glory. Because of this miracle, Jesus' disciples believed in Him. (John 2:11) He performed many other miracles, and, so, many believed in Him. (John 2:23) That is to say, many believed He was sent from God. Nicodemus said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (John 3:2)

Jesus said that His miracles bore witness to who He is. When John the Baptist, in prison for the sake of righteousness, expressed doubts about whether Jesus was the Christ, Jesus pointed to His mighty works as proof. He said to John's disciples, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matthew 11:1-6) John had once born witness to Jesus, but Jesus told the people that He had a witness an even greater than John: the works that He did by the power of God. He said to the people, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me... But I have greater witness than *that* of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (John 5:31, 32, 36)

In time, many began to think that Jesus may be the Christ. Jesus miraculously knew details of the life of the Samaritan woman at the well, so she said to the men of her city, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) After Jesus healed a man possessed by a devil, and both blind and mute, "all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?" (Matthew 12:23) Saint John writes, "And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this *man* hath done?" (John 7:31)

There was much disagreement in Israel on the matter of Jesus, however. This was, in part, because there was much confusion about Him. The people were divided. Some said Jesus was the prophet that Moses said would come. Others said He was the Christ. Some said He could not be the Christ because the Christ would be a descendant of King David, and from the town of Bethlehem, the city of David, but Jesus was from Galilee. The rulers were divided. Many believed in Him, but "they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." Nicodemus, a Pharisee, believed Jesus was from God, but other Pharisees condemned Jesus, saying, "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." (John 7:40-53) Of course, although Jesus had lived for many years in Galilee, He was born in Bethlehem.

But there was another reason for the disagreement. Some had evil hearts of unbelief. Jesus said to certain Jews who opposed Him, "Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not." (John 8:44, 45) On one occasion, at the Feast of Dedication, Jesus was in the temple, and the Jews said to Him, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:22-27)

Some, however, were quite confident that Jesus is the Christ, and they were bold to confess Him. When Jesus called Nathaniel to be His disciple, Nathaniel said to Him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." (John 1:39) Martha said to Jesus, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (John 11:27) Saint Peter said to Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus' works were a witness that He is the Christ. He might not have performed any works, and simply testified of Himself, but the Jews did accept His testimony. When He proclaimed, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," the Pharisees said to Him, "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true." Their argument was that Jesus could not testify on His own behalf, because His testimony may be false. He needed a corroborating witness. This is why Jesus had

performed miracles by the hand of God. By those miracles, God bore witness that Jesus was His Son. Yet, in fact, Jesus' testimony of Himself is, not only true, but sufficient. It is sufficient just because He is the Son of God, and so His word is, not only absolutely true, it is necessarily true. It is necessarily true because it is against God's nature to lie. When God speaks, His word is absolutely trustworthy. He cannot swear by anything that His testimony is true, because nothing is as great as He is. So, when He made a covenant with Abraham, although His word was sufficient, in order to reinforce to Abraham's heirs the promise He made, He swore by Himself. Saint Paul writes, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Hebrews 6:17, 18) So, when the Jews told Jesus He could not testify on behalf of Himself, he contradicted them, and said to them, "Though I bear record of myself, *yet* my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go." (John 8:14) That is to say, He could bear witness of Himself because He is the Son of God. Nevertheless, because men bear false witness, the Law of Moses forbade them do so, and stated that a man may be judged, not on the basis of a single witness, but on the testimony of two, or three, witnesses. (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) Jesus testified of Himself, and His Father, too, testified of Him. So, Jesus said, "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." (John 8:18) Furthermore, the Spirit also bore witness of Jesus, because it was by the power of the Spirit that He performed miracles. Jesus said, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." (Matthew 12:28) So, Saint John wrote in one of his epistles, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." (1 John 5:7)

Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, and He proved it by His many miracles, especially by His resurrection from the dead. His disciples did not see Him rise from the dead. No man did. Some of the women, however, when they saw the empty tomb, remembered the words that Jesus spoke to them when He was alive, how He must die, and rise from the dead according to the Scriptures. (Luke 24:5-8) They remembered, and they believed. They told their disciples, but the disciples did not believe them. (Mark 16:12-13) When Jesus finally did appear to disciples, except for Thomas, they did believe, but Jesus rebuked them for not believing the testimony of the women. (Mark 16:14) When the disciples told Thomas that they had seen Jesus alive, he said he would not believe unless saw Jesus for himself. When Thomas saw Jesus, he did believe, but Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed." (John 20:24-29) The pious Christian walks by faith, and not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Saint John wrote in one of his epistles:

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:9-13)

Some do not believe the testimony of the apostles, and so they do not believe God. Saint Paul, after he believed in Jesus, went to Jerusalem. While there, he fell into a trance, and the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." (Acts 22:18) So, the Lord sent him to the Gentiles, who would believe. The Son of God has borne witness of Himself, and the Father and the Spirit have also borne Him witness. Their testimony is to be believed, because they cannot lie. The apostles have proclaimed this to the world, and it is recorded in the Scriptures for all to read. So, Saint John wrote in his Gospel, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name... This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. (John 20:31; 21:24)

Saint Augustine, in his *Confession*, wrote of the necessity of the testimony of men, and of the veracity of God:

Then Thou, O Lord, little by little with most tender and most merciful hand, touching and composing my heart, didst persuade me—considering what innumerable things I believed, which I saw not, nor was present while they were done, as so many things in secular history, so many reports of places and of cities, which I had not seen; so many of friends, so many of physicians, so many continually of other men, which unless we should believe, we should do nothing at all in this life; lastly, with how unshaken an assurance I believed of what parents I was born, which I could not know, had I not believed upon hearsay—considering all this, Thou didst persuade me, that not they who believed Thy Books (which Thou hast established in so great authority among almost all nations), but they who believed them not, were to be blamed; and that they were not to be heard, who should say to me, “How knowest thou those Scriptures to have been imparted unto mankind by the Spirit of the one true and most true God?” For this very thing was of all most to be believed, since no contentiousness of blasphemous questionings, of all that multitude which I had read in the self-contradicting philosophers, could wring this belief from me, “That Thou art” whatsoever Thou wert (what I knew not), and “That the government of human things belongs to Thee.” (*Confessions*, 6.5)

Let us walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us take God at His word. Although we have not seen Jesus, let us believe in Him, and love Him.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto HIm that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. *Amen.*