

**The Gospel of John (36);
The Third Discourse of Jesus (6)**

Introduction:

Let us turn in our Bibles to John 5:41-46.

It is our intention today to address this last paragraph of John 5 in order to complete our study of the third discourse of Jesus recorded by the apostle John in His Gospel.¹ Last Lord's Day we considered the testimony of four different witnesses to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God--that He is God incarnate, that He is both God and man (5:31-40). We read in the passage before us today how Jesus responded to those who had heard Him regarding these four witnesses. In doing so He diagnosed and addressed the true spiritual condition of their souls. May the Lord use His words this morning to help us diagnose the condition of our souls, and may He bring us comfort or remedy, depending on the need of each of us.

It is important that we state once again that Jesus' words in this discourse were originally directly to unbelievers. These men were unbelieving Jews, presumably Jewish leaders, who were filled with rage toward Jesus, who persecuted Him, who desired and plotted to kill Him (cf. 5:16, 18). Jesus held before them the testimony of four witnesses who testified of His person as the Son of God incarnate. They included, (1) the witness of John the Baptist (vs. 33-35), (2) the witness of the works of Jesus (v. 36), (3) the witness of the Father Himself (vs. 37-38), and (4) the witness of the Holy Scriptures (v. 39). God the Father had set forth these four witnesses to testify and validate that Jesus is the Son of God.

However, in spite of the clear four-fold witness that God the Father had provided them regarding His Son, Jesus said of these Jews, "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (v. 40). Here we see that the failure to believe on the person of Jesus Christ, to embrace Him as eternal God who became one of us, is a very clear revelation of the grievous nature and extent of sin. The fact that these Jewish men refused to believe on Him, although they had the infallible testimony that God had given them through these four witnesses, reveals that their unbelief was not merely due to *ignorance* of the truth, but due to their *rejection* of the truth. These men were not merely unable to believe because they were ignorant, because once they had become informed, they continued unabated in their hatred and efforts to kill Him. Yes, perhaps they had been unable to believe due to ignorance, but now that they were informed, their unreasonable obstinacy is revealed. They refused to believe on Jesus Christ, although the evidence clearly substantiated His identity. They were hardened sinners, although they saw themselves as very devout men.

Now these same four witnesses are valid and suitable for us to employ today in our witness to the unbelieving world. In order for people to be saved from their sin, they must not only understand what Jesus did in order to save sinners—that He lived and died in order to save sinners-- but they must believe fully and completely who He is in truth. He is the Son of God, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Belief in the blessed Holy Trinity is an essential doctrine that must be believed in order to receive salvation. Yes, other truths also need to be understood and believed, but this is the truth that stands at the head of the list. People must know who Jesus is. As Jesus held forth these four witnesses to Himself as the true Son of God, so we may also call on these witnesses when we speak of others of Jesus Christ. We may call upon them to substantiate before unbelievers the validity of our truth claims of Jesus. In this way the Lord may reveal to them the sinful resistance of their hearts, the evil of their sin, the need for God's grace both to instruct them and enable them to embrace the truth wholly, and to trust Him completely. But we should not be surprised when many refuse to heed our witness, that they reject the truth claims of these valid witnesses. If they would not receive the testimony of these four witnesses as told to them by the Son of God Himself, we should not be surprised if and when people reject our witness. Nevertheless, God can by grace use our witness to convict and convert those who are presently in unbelief and rebellion.

¹ This third discourse of Jesus is in John 5:19-47.

Let us now read the final paragraph of this third discourse, which is **John 5:41-47**. Jesus said,

⁴¹“I do not receive honor from men. ⁴²But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. ⁴⁴How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. ⁴⁶For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

There are actually six statements of Jesus in this paragraph that addressed these unbelieving men. These six statements may be seen as setting forth two themes. First, Jesus revealed the true spiritual reason for the unbelief of these Jews (vs. 41-43). Second, Jesus revealed the terrible and fearful consequences of their unbelief (vs. 44-47).

And so, first Jesus showed...

I. The spiritual reason for the unbelief of these Jews (5:41-43).

1. Jesus *desires* no honor from men. (John 5:41)

Jesus first stated, “***I do not receive honor from men***” (5:41). This translation is the New King James Version (NKJV). The newer English translations use the word, “glory”, rather than “honor.” This is actually preferable. Jesus said, “I do not receive glory from men”, in other words, from “people” (as in the ESV). But the word “glory” can have a variety of nuances depending on the context in which the word is found. In this context, what Jesus meant was that He did not desire or derive recognition or honor from man. The translation that Edward Klink has in his commentary on John reads this way: “For I do not receive recognition from humanity.” Klink then defined the word that he translated as “recognition”, where other versions translate the Greek word as “honor” or “glory.”

While the word “recognition” (Δόξαν) is often translated as “praise” or “glory” (e.g., NRSV; NASV), in this context it must be referring to what BDAG defines as “recognition of status or performance.”²

This first statement of verse 41 is in the context of Jesus calling upon the Holy Scriptures that testify of His true identity and nature as the Son of God incarnate. Verses 39 and 40 recorded His words, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” Here in verse 41 He declared that only the honor from His Father was what concerned Him, not the honor that men could give Him.

Perhaps the Lord Jesus perceived an attitude or outlook that characterized these Jewish leaders, that they thought that He was upset because they failed to honor Him or give Him the recognition that He thought that He deserved from them. Jesus was telling them that it was immaterial to Him whether or not they gave Him honor. His concern was that He would please God His Father, and that He would receive His approbation, not man’s. **Robert Lenski** said it well:

Jesus has said: these Jews would not believe in *Him* (v. 38), the Scriptures testify of *Him*, the Jews will not come to *Him*. Jesus reads their hearts and sees how they may think that He is motivated just as they are, that He is piqued because they do not honor and glorify Him. This He cuts off at once. “**Glory from men I do not take**”, compare 8:50. The object is placed forward for emphasis: “glory,” honor,

² Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 294. Klink’s reference to BDAG is the standard Greel Lexicon used by scholars: **English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature**, by Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arnt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

praise, distinction “from men,” in distinction from “the glory that comes from the only God” (v. 44). Even when men offered it to Him (6:15) He spurned it and did not catch it, λαμβάνω (Greek, meaning “receive”) in the sense of *capto*. Jesus took only the glory which God gave Him, God directly, and God through the faith of believing men. Let not these Jews imagine that Jesus is miffed because *they* do not honor Him, that this is why He is scoring (rebuking) them so severely.³

What Jesus revealed in these words is that these men thought so highly of themselves that they thought that it really mattered to Him what they thought of Him. Their opinion of Him was absolutely inconsequential to Him. And we might say that this same attitude should characterize every believer, every true disciple of Jesus: “If the Lord will honor me, that is all that I desire. The praise of man means nothing in comparison to receiving His approval, His honor, for having lived and served before Him in faith, fellowship, and obedience.

2. Jesus declared their desperate, sinful, spiritual condition. (John 5:42)

Jesus said to these men, “*But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you*” (5:42). First, Jesus declared, “*I know you.*” It may be that Jesus drew this conclusion from observing their refusal to believe on Him. Their rejection of Him revealed the absence of the love of God in their souls. Or, Jesus could have been declaring that He knew their hearts. Now, although in His divine nature Jesus Christ was omniscient—His knowledge is infinite-- in His ministry on earth He did not call upon His divine nature to live or serve God. Rather, in His human nature God His Father informed Him of everything He needed to know through the Holy Spirit that the Father had given Him “without measure”, or without limit. The Holy Spirit enabled His human nature as the Messiah to know the spiritual condition of those about Him.

We have already seen this in John’s Gospel. In John 1 we read of Jesus’ ability to discern the spiritual condition of Nathanael. There we read,

⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”

⁴⁸Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

⁴⁹Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:47-49)

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Jesus the spiritual condition of Nathanael.

The Lord Jesus is now enthroned in heaven. There is no longer the masking of His divine nature that was true during His earthly sojourn. He reigns over all things as the Divine Man, His two natures working in beautiful harmony as He superintends the realization of God’s eternal decree, bringing salvation to the ones that His Father had given to Him from eternity and bringing His just judgment upon all those who continue in their sinful rebellion to His kingdom.

Second, not only did Jesus say to these men, “I know you”, but He said to them, “you do not have the love of God in you.” This was the heart of their spiritual condition.

The rejection of Jesus by the Jews is therefore the rejection of God; and since His mission is the exposition of the love of God (3:16; 1 John 4:9-11) His rejection by the Jews declares them to be void of the love of God—*I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves*. This judgment means that the gulf between Jesus and the Jews is unbridgeable, for the division between them concerns the reality of God. They direct their eyes to God in order that their selfish desires may be strengthened—this is sin;

³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 417.

He, in order that every trace of egotism and independent desire may be destroyed—this is righteousness (17:25, 26).⁴

When Jesus said to them, “you do not have the love of God in you”, we should ask ourselves what He meant precisely by the phrase, “the love *of God*.” The expression could be understood in a couple of different ways. He could have been saying to them, “you do not have the love *for* God in you.”⁵ Or, Jesus could have been saying, “You do not have the love *that God gives*.”⁶ The Bible not only speaks of the love that we should have for God, but it also speaks of the love that God imparts to the hearts of His people. Regarding this second meaning, the apostle Paul wrote,

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because ***God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*** who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:3-5, ESV)

Which is the meaning of “the love of God” here, objective or subjective? In this instance we may have an example of both ideas being conveyed by our Lord.⁷ He was declaring that they did not love God, nor did they have God’s love in them. He declared this of them because they did not and would not give Him the honor as the God’s only begotten Son. 1 John 5:1 records, “... everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.” And although John was speaking directly of love for other Christians, certainly the same truth holds to loving the very Son of God. The one who loves God will love God’s Son. If one does not love the Son of God, it is sure proof that he does not love God.

Now Jesus said to these men, “But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.” He could say to every one of us, “I know you.” Would He say to you, or to me, “you do not have the love of God in you”? May that not be so respecting anyone of us. But let us be honest with ourselves. Ask yourself honestly regarding the state of your soul. Do you have the love of God in you? How can you tell? Do you love Jesus Christ supremely? Do you truly desire above all other matters that He, the Son of God, would be glorified by you and through you to the world about you? Do you desire that His cause, rather your own, that His interests, rather than your own, that His name would be recognized, acknowledged, and celebrated by others, not your own name? And if you conclude that this is not true of you, then beseech the Lord that He would shed abroad in your heart His love so that you then will love Him supremely. May we receive greater love from God so that we might have greater love for God, through His Son, to His glory!

3. **Jesus described the manifestation of their sin.** (John 5:43)

We read in **John 5:43** our Lord Jesus saying, “***I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.***” Here we see that Jesus charges them with an additional crime. While they would reject the true Son whom the Father sent to them, at the same time they receive another who comes to them without divine credentials or authentication.

First, Jesus said, “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me.” Jesus did not come to promote Himself, but He came to represent and reveal the Father. There was no self-exaltation on His part. There was no desire to promote His own cause, to make a name for Himself. This itself should have commended Him to them as one who was true and righteous. He was not self-serving.

⁴ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 274.

⁵ This would be the *objective* meaning of the genitive phrase, “of God” (τοῦ θεοῦ).

⁶ This would be the *subjective* genitive or the genitive of *source*, describing the love that God imparts to His people.

⁷ Daniel Wallace treats this phrase, “of God”, as a “possible example” of a plenary genitive. What he meant by this is that this genitive may serve not as either an objective or a subjective genitive, but that it conveys both ideas. Daniel Wallace, **Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics** (Zondervan, 1996), pp. 119-121.

But then *secondly* Jesus said, “If another comes in his own name, him you will receive.” If one came among them promoting himself as “somebody” to whom they should give and show regard, they embraced him readily. And so, they turned away from the truth, preferring error instead. They were as the ancient Israelites whom the prophets renounced:

For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see,
Send to Kedar and consider diligently,
And see if there has been such a thing.

¹¹Has a nation changed its gods,
Which are not gods?

But My people have changed their glory
For what does not profit.

¹²Be astonished, O heavens, at this,
And be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate,” says the LORD.

¹³“*For My people have committed two evils:*

They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,

And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:10-13)

These Jews would not receive Jesus, who came in order to promote the cause of His Father, who had His Father’s commission, whose Father’s witnesses testified of Him, who sought only to further His Father’s name. But they would embrace liars and deceivers, who sought to promote themselves. They are shown not to be merely ignorant, but totally perverse.

Matthew Henry drew some generalities from these words of Jesus:

They have *hewn out broken cisterns*, they hearken to everyone that will set up in his own name. They forsake their own mercies, which is bad enough; and it is for *lying vanities*, which is worse. Observe here,

1. Those are false prophets who come in their own name, who run without being sent, and set up for themselves only.

2. It is just with God to suffer (allow) those to be deceived with false prophets who receive not the truth in the love of it. (2 Thess. 2:10f). The errors of antichrist are the just punishment of those who obey not the doctrine of Christ. They that shut their eyes against the true light are by the judgment of God given up to wander endlessly after *false lights*, and to be led aside after every *ignis fatuus* (i.e. something deceptive or deluding).

3. It is the gross folly of many that, while they *nauseate* (cast away) ancient truths, they are *fond* of upstart errors; they loathe manna, and at the same time *feed upon ashes*. After the Jews had rejected Christ and his gospel, they were continually haunted with spectres, with *false Christs* and *false prophets* (Matt. 24:24), and their proneness to follow such occasioned those distractions and seditions that hastened their ruin.

They are here charged with pride and vain-glory, and unbelief, the effect of them (5:44). Having sharply reprov'd their unbelief, like a wise physician, He here searches into the cause, lays the axe to the root. They *therefore* slighted and undervalued Christ because they *admired* and *overvalued* themselves.⁸

⁸ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 936.

After our Lord revealed **the spiritual reason for the unbelief of these Jews (5:41-43)**, Jesus then revealed...

II. The terrible and fearful consequences of their unbelief. (5:44-47)

Here we continue with the six statements of Jesus in this paragraph that addressed these unbelieving men.

4. Jesus *disputed* with them, showing their unreasonable sinfulness. (John 5:44)

We read in **John 5:44**, ***“How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?”*** Here Jesus speaks of their inability to rise above their sin. “How can you believe considering what drives your hearts?” He charges them with self pride and vanity, seeking glory for themselves from one another. “They *therefore* slighted and undervalued Christ because they *admired* and *overvalued* themselves” (Matthew Henry).

They set their hearts to obtain glory for themselves. They were driven by the desire to be esteemed by others as better than others. This climate is rife for envy, petty jealousies, backstabbing, and rumor mongering. The kind of climate that is in many workplaces in these dark days. And sadly, it is the conditions in many churches, so-called, that have long since forsaken the faith and practice of God’s Word. But this was true even in the first century. This same Gospel writer wrote in an epistle about this same time:

⁹I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. ¹⁰Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

¹¹Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 9-11)

This man, Diotrefes, was much like these Jewish men whom Jesus upbraided due to their pride and their self-promotion. He wanted the chief place, to be regarded as the preeminent one in the church. This is what governed his thinking and shaped his relationships. And when someone came along, like the apostle John, who might be regarded by his peers with more honor than he, he would prevent his presence and denigrate his name among the others. Jesus asked, “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?” Implying that they could not and would not believe on Him with honor, for they would perceive that their own desires would be frustrated.

Much of the opposition to Jesus by this generation was due to envy on the part of the Jewish leaders. The Roman governor knew this was their motivation, for we read in Mark’s Gospel:

And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. ⁹And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ¹⁰For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. (Mark 15:8-10)

This attitude and behavior continued among the unbelieving Jews toward the early Christian leaders, particularly the Apostle Paul. We read of the reaction of Jewish leaders to the great work of God’s grace taking place in Acts 13.

⁴²So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. ⁴³Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the multitudes, ***they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they***

opposed the things spoken by Paul. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:42-46)

But not only did they seek honor from one another, they had no true desire to receive honor from God. Again, Jesus said to them, “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, ***and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?***” This is ultimately a manifestation of the sin that characterized our first parents and has continued in all of their descendants. Rather than truly desiring and seeking the glory of God, as the Lord Jesus sought to glorify the Father, sinful people desire glory for themselves. They desire to be as God, which is the essence of the sin to which Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent (Cf. Gen. 3:4).

These Jews who would not believe on Him, they could not believe on Him, because of their sin. Their entire world view and their entire drive, motivation for living, were diametrically opposed to one another. There was no common ground. These men did not want the honor that comes from God, although they would have claimed to desire this honor. In reality they wanted the honor of their peers. Jesus was driven by a desire that they could not understand and would not embrace. Jesus desired to be honored by His Father, which would only come to Him as He denied Himself and take up His cross and be willing to suffer and die in order to glorify His Father through His faith and obedience. **F. F. Bruce** stated it this way:

To admit the claims of Jesus would have won them “the glory which comes from the only God”; but at the same time they would lose the esteem of their peers, which meant so much to them, as it means so much to most people. The situation is summed up later by the Evangelist in 12:43: “they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God.” Thus they could have little sympathy with one who saw so clearly the difference between true glory and false, and desired his Father’s approval above everything else.⁹

5. Jesus *discredited* their false confidence in Moses.

This is set forth in **verses 45 and 46**: “***Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.***” The Lord Jesus declared to them that He would not be their prosecutor on the Day of Judgment, but Moses would be. Rather than believing Moses’ words, they believed ***in*** Moses himself. Whereas Christians have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, these Jews placed their faith in Moses. They looked to Moses as their savior rather than Jesus. But in reality they did not believe what Moses had taught them, for he taught them to believe in Christ as their Savior, the One Moses promised would come. Jesus said that Moses “wrote of Me.”

Now when Jesus spoke of “Moses” in whom they trusted, He was referring to the law that God brought to His people through Moses. They thought that they were saved through keeping the law, rather than understanding that the Moses had intended the law to direct them to place their faith in Christ, the Messiah who would come. In other words, the Law of Moses was to them a covenant of works, whereby they thought that they possessed or would merit God’s favor, receiving eternal life which they thought they deserved. Paul described their approach to God’s law as terribly flawed, which resulted in condemning them in their sin rather than saving them from sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote of Gentiles coming to Christ where the majority of Jews failed to do so:

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³²Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³As it is written:

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,

⁹ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 138.

And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ²For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and *seeking to establish their own righteousness*, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴***For Christ is the end of the law¹⁰ for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

⁵For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom. 9:30-10:9)

God gave His law through Moses to Israel as a covenant of works. God promised to bless them in their obedience but curse them in their disobedience to this law as a covenant. Romans 10:5 is a quotation of Leviticus 18:5. Paul was referencing what Moses pronounced to them when he gave them the law as a covenant. They were to attempt to keep the righteousness of the law. But even in giving them the law of God, Moses wrote of the coming of salvation by God’s grace, not through what they did, but by what the coming Messiah would do on their behalf. Romans 10:6 and 7 is a reference to Moses’ words of Deuteronomy 30:12-14. There Moses wrote of the covenant of grace by which they could be saved through faith in the coming Messiah. The covenant of works which Moses gave them was to direct them to the cross of Christ, to the Messiah in whom they were to trust for the forgiveness of sins and for the gift of righteousness, a righteousness that was unattainable through keeping the Mosaic law. The Law of Moses as a covenant of works was to direct them to the promised covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.¹¹

Now if you look carefully once again at John 5:45 and 46, Jesus said in a few words what we have just attempted to say in the previous paragraph. Jesus said to these Jews, ***“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust.”*** The law as a covenant of works will one day condemn them at the final judgment. As Paul wrote in Romans 2:2,

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law (i.e. unbelieving Gentiles), and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (i.e. unbelieving Jews).

Jesus then said that Moses had wrote of Him. Jesus said, ***“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me”*** (5:46). Had they really understood Moses, they would have realized that he never promised them salvation by keeping the works of the law, but rather by their attempt to keep the works of the law they would be brought to see their helplessness in sin and their need to trust in the Messiah, who would one day come to save them from their transgressions of God’s law. Jesus essentially said in John 5:45 and 46 that these Jews sought to be saved by the covenant of works, rather than submitting

¹⁰ Paul was not saying that the authority of the law ended when Christ came, but that if the law were rightly followed it would have led them to Christ. Jesus Christ is the end, or the culmination of the law. When the Holy Spirit uses the law of God in His work of salvation, it brings sinners to see their desperate condition and that only a divine Savior can deliver them from their sin.

¹¹ To those who have ears to hear, this paragraph distinguishes between the Paedobaptist view and the Reformed Baptist view of the Law of Moses. Our Reformed Paedobaptist friends who hold to covenant theology believe that the Law of Moses given at Sinai was an administration of the covenant of grace, which the Jews distorted into a covenant of works, resulting in their condemnation. Historically, Reformed Baptist covenant theology taught that God did give the law of Moses to Israel as a covenant of works, which was to convict the Jews of sin, their condemnation, and their inability to save themselves, and thereby directed the Jews to look for the coming Messiah who would institute the new covenant, that is, the covenant of grace, by which the Old Testament Jews would be saved, as they looked in faith to the life and sacrifice of their Messiah, to which all of their sacrifices and service in the tabernacle and temple, indeed, all the law of Moses, pointed them.

to the “honor” that God could convey to them through the covenant of grace, through believing what Moses had written of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

It is interesting to understand a detail in the Greek text of this verse that stands behind our English translation. In Greek when there is a conditional sentence, like we have here in verse 46, the nuance of meaning is expressed through the different Greek words used in the clauses. Here John has recorded that Jesus was confronting their *refusal* to believe, not just their *failure* to do so. If we could paraphrase the text, it could read this way: Jesus essentially said, “If you believed Moses—but you do not—, then you would believe Me.”¹² Understanding and believing the Old Testament Scriptures would have led them to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It would not happen to these Jews, however, as long as they failed and refused to believe that the Scriptures pointed to and revealed to them Jesus Christ. They claimed to understand and believe the Scriptures, but they did neither, for all of Scripture testifies of Jesus Christ. Moses, that is, the Torah written by Moses, testified to Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus appealed to them, telling them that they would never embrace Him in faith while they continued in their present sin, their desire for their own glory and honor, rather than seeking the honor that God confers to His people through grace. And so, we read that...

6. Jesus demanded that they consider their hopeless condition.

We read in **John 5:47**, “*But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*” They neither had understanding of the Scriptures nor faith in what the Scriptures taught them. They were characterized by both ignorance and obstinacy. Unless God saved them by His grace, they would perish in their unbelief and their rebellion. And yet all this while they were confident that they were right with God and that they had salvation from Him, even while they withstood and opposed God’s Son who was before them.

Moses did particularly prophesy of Christ, as the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Shiloh, the great Prophet; the ceremonies of the Law of Moses were figures of Him that was to come. The Jews made Moses the patron of their opposition to Christ; but Christ here shows them their error, that Moses was so far from writing against Christ that he wrote for Him, and of Him.¹³

II. Understanding a few implications of our passage

These Jewish men failed to seek Jesus in order to believe on Him for salvation from sin. They might have sought Him to a degree, but only if they could derive some honor from Him for themselves or for some other temporal benefit. ***But as far as seeking Him because they desired that He would receive honor from them, this was of no interest to them.*** They desired glory for themselves, not glory for Jesus Christ. They thought that they were godly, but in reality they were terribly worldly.

A worldly man or woman is an ungodly man or woman. Whether or not he or she goes to church or reads the Scriptures is immaterial. Their whole world view is in conflict with God and His ways. The worldly man loves himself supremely. He desires his own well-being above all else and above everybody else. He is envious of those with wealth, perhaps jealous of another’s physical attractiveness. The excitement that the world can bring to him fascinates him and is the subject of his desires and fantasies. His disappointment is that he does not have it now and the fun that comes with it. He is envious of people who seem to have what he desires for himself. He really has no real interest in Christ or His Word. His delight is in this world and the things of this world.

What would Jesus say to that one? He would say what He told these “church-going” men. Again, we read in **John 5:42** our Lord’s words, “***But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.***” Is this what Jesus will say of you one day when you stand before Him in judgment? “I know you, that you do not

¹² Wallace, p. 695.

¹³ Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 937.

have the love of God in you.” The fate will be the same as these men to whom Jesus spoke so clearly and directly. For if you had the love of God within you, you would love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely. You would desire that He would receive glory through your thoughts, words, and actions. You would be deeply grieved upon learning that something you thought, something you said, something you did, dishonored Him rather than bringing glory to Him.

Now what should we do if upon considering this matter, if we conclude that there is no love of God within us? What are we to do? I came across a written sermon by a relatively unknown Puritan named **John Howe** (1630-1705). He gave a sermon based on John 5:42 in which Jesus said, “But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.” Actually it was his congregation that published it on his behalf, as he was reluctant lest it bring honor to him rather than his Lord. Below are a few of his ideas and words of counsel on this matter. First, he urged his hearers to...

Plainly and positively pass the true judgment. If the characters that you have heard do carry the matter (that you have not love for God in you) so come at last plainly and positively to pass the true judgment of your own case, though it be a sad one, and tell your own souls. Oh my soul, though I must sadly say it; I must say it. All things conclude and make against thee. The love of God is not in thee. Why, is it not as good this should be the present issue at your own bar, and at the tribunal of your own conscience, as before God’s judgment-seat? Why should you not concur and fall in with Christ the authorized Judge? Whose judgment is according to truth. Why, this is a thing that must be done, the case requires it, and God’s express Word requires it (1 Cor. 11.31). Other previous and preparatory duty, plainly enjoined, doth by consequence enjoin it, and requires that it follow (2 Cor. 13.5). What is examination for, but in order to judgment? It must therefore be done, and I shall shew how it must be done, and proceed to some farther directions.

First, you must do it solemnly. Take your selves aside at some fit season or another. Inspect your own souls, review your Life. Consider what your wonted frame and your ordinary course has been. And if you find by such characters as heretofore were given, this is the truth of your case, then let judgment pass upon deliberation. Oh my soul! Thou hast not the love of God in thee. Whatsoever thine appearances hitherto have been. And whatsoever thy peace and quiet hath been, thou hast not the love of God in thee. Let it be done with solemnity.

Secondly, do it in the sight of God as before Him, as under His eye, as under the eye of Christ. That eye that is as a flame of fire, that searches hearts, and tries reins. Arraign thy self before him. Lord! I have here brought before thee a guilty soul, a delinquent soul, a wretched, a horrid delinquent, a soul that was breathed into me by Thee, an intelligent, understanding soul, a soul that hath love in its nature, but a soul that never loved Thee.

Thirdly, judge thyself before Him as to the fact, and as to the fault. As to the fact, I have never yet loved thee, O God, I own it to Thee. Lord! I accuse, I charge my soul with this before Thee, this is the truth of the fact, I have not the love of God in me. And charge thyself, my soul, with the fault. Oh horrid creature that I am! I was made by Thee, and do not love Thee. Thou didst breathe into me this reasonable immortal spirit, and it doth not love Thee. It is Thy own off-spring, and does not love thee. It can never be blessed in anything but Thee, and it does not love Thee. And then hereupon in the

Fourth place, join to this self-judging, self-loathing. That we are to judge ourselves, is a Law laid upon us by the Supreme Law-giver, the one Law-giver, that hath power to save, and to destroy. And His Word that enjoins it, as plainly tells us what must go with it, that this self-judging must be accompanied with self-loathing (Ezek. 6:9; 20:43; 36.31). Do God that right upon thyself, that thou mayest tell Him, Blessed God! I do even hate myself, because I find I have not loved Thee, and I cannot but hate myself, and I never will be reconciled to myself, until I find I am reconciled to Thee. This is doing justice: doth not the Scripture usually and familiarly so represent to us the great turn of the soul to God? When poor

sinner become penitents, and return, that they are brought to hate themselves, and loath themselves in their own eyes? And is there anything that can make a soul so loathsome in itself, or ought to make it so loathsome to itself, as not to love God, to be destitute of the love of God? And then,

Fifthly, hereupon too: pity thyself, pity thy own soul, there is cause to hate it, to loath it, and is there no cause to pity it? To lament it? Doth not this look like a lamentable case? Oh! What a soul have I, that can love anything else, that can love trifles, that can love impurities, that can love sin. And cannot love God, Christ, the most desirable good of souls? What a soul have I? What a monster in the creation of God is this soul of mine! I think you should set yourselves, if any of you can find this to be the case, to weep over your own souls. Some may see cause to say: Oh my soul, thou hast in thee other valuable things, thou hast understanding in thee, judgment in thee, wit in thee; perhaps learning, considerable acquired endowments in thee; but thou hast not the love of God in thee. I can do many other commendable or useful things. I can discourse plausibly, argue subtly, I can manage affairs dexterously, but I can't love God. Oh my Soul, how great an essential dost thou want (lack) to all religion, to all duty, to all felicity! The one thing necessary thou wantest (do not have), thou hast everything but what thou needs more than anything, more than all things. And oh my soul, what is like at this rate to become of thee? Where art thou to have thy eternal abode? To what regions of horror, and darkness, and woe, art thou going? What society can be fit for thee? No lover of God! No lover of God! What, but of infernal accursed spirits that are at utmost distance from Him, and to whom no beam of holy vital Light shall ever shine to all eternity! Thou, oh my soul, art self-abandoned to the blackness of darkness forever. Thy doom is in thy breast, thy own bosom. Thy no-love to God is thy own doom, thy eternal doom. It creates thee a present hell, and shews whither thou belongest.

Sixth place: let a due fear and solicitude hereupon be set on work in thee. For consider thyself as one shortly to be arraigned before the supreme tribunal. And then here is the critical, vertical point upon which thy judgment turns. Lovers of God, or no lovers of God. All are to be judged in reference to what they were and did in the body, whether good or evil (as in 2 Corinthians 5:10)... According to that you are to be judged. Did you love God in this body while here, yea or no? And this is a trial upon the most fundamental point. For as all the law is comprehended in love, as was formerly hinted, if you be found guilty in this point, that you were no lover of God, totally destitute of the love of God, you were a perpetual underminer of his whole government, of the whole frame of his law, a disloyal creature, rebellious and false to the God that made you, to Jesus Christ that redeemed you by His blood. All disobedience and rebellion is summed up in this one word: Having been no lover of God. And won't it make any man's heart to meditate terror, to think of having such a charge as this likely to lie against him in the judgment of that day; that day, when the secrets of all hearts are to be laid open? Every work must be then brought into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil (Eccles. 12.14). And it will be to the confusion of many a one. It may be your no-love of God was heretofore a great secret: You had a heart in which was no love of God, but it was a secret, you took not care to have it writ in your forehead. You conversed with men so plausibly, no body took you to be no lover of God, to have a heart disaffected to God. But now out comes the secret, that which you kept for a great secret all your days, out comes the secret: And to have such a secret as this disclosed to that vast assembly before angels and men! Here was a creature, a reasonable creature, an intelligent soul, that lived upon the divine bounty and goodness so many years in the world below, and hid a false disloyal heart by a plausible shew, and external profession of great devotedness to God all the time of his abode in that world. Oh! What a fearful thing would it be to have this secret so disclosed? And do you think that all the loyal creatures that shall be spectators and auditors in the hearing of that great day, will not all conceive a just and a loyal indignation against such a one when convicted of not loving God, convicted of not loving Him that gave him breath, Him whose he was, to whom he belonged, whose name he bore? What a fearful thing will it be to stand convicted so upon such a point as this?... I would fear that even the very stones in the streets should fly against me and everything that meets me be my death. What, to go about the streets from day to day with a heart void of the love of God! What a heart have I? Fear ought to be exercised in this case. We are bid to fear if we do evil against a humane ruler. If thou do

that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain (Rom. 13.4). But if I be such an evil doer against the Supreme Ruler, the Lord of Heaven and Earth! Have I not reason to be afraid? And to think sadly with myself what will the end of this be? But yet I will add in the

Seventh place: Do not despair for all this. God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. As in that 2 Corinthians 5:19. That sin might not be imputed. He is in Christ to reconcile you to win hearts, to captivate souls to the love of God. For what else is reconciliation on our part? He is in Christ to reconcile, to conquer enmity, to subdue disaffected hearts, to make such souls call and cry, “My Lord, and my God! I have been a stranger to thee. I will through Thy grace be so no longer.” Therefore do not despair. Despair that ever you should do well without loving of God. But do not despair you shall ever be brought to love Him by no means. You have to do with Him that is the element of love, the God of love, the Fountain of love, the great Source of love, the Fountain at once both of loveliness and love, whose nature is love, and is with his name in his Son, who was manifested in the flesh full of grace and truth, i.e. sincerest love. He was incarnate love. Love pointed at us, and is upon these terms able to transform all the world into love. The nature of God is all love (1 John 4.16), and in Christ, He is Emanuel, God with us, so the Divine Love hath a direct aspect upon us. Why not, then, apply yourselves to Him? Turn yourselves towards Him, open your souls to Him. Say to Him, Lord, flow in with all the mighty powers of Thine own love upon my soul. Thou that the true genuine sons of Abraham, and there can be no such children, without love. Oh dissolve this stone, this stone in my breast, mollify this obdurate heart, and turn it into love! How soon may it be done upon due application! He can quickly do it, draw thee into a love-union with Himself, so as that thou shouldest come to dwell in love. And dwell in God, who is love. And He in thee. Then the foundations are surely laid, for all thy future duty, and for all thy future felicity. Then how pleasantly wilt thou obey, and how blessedly wilt thou enjoy God forever! But such application must be made through Christ, and for the Spirit. Which Spirit is the Spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind, as you have it in 1 Timothy 1:7. But these things I cannot now further insist upon. FINIS.

The Lord has said, “For those who honor Me I will honor,
and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” (1 Sam. 2:30)
