

Defeating the Desires of Unbelief

John 5:30-47

B.I: The heart of unbelief is not conflicting data but competing desires, and faith flourishes when empowered by obedient love.

Introduction:

We return this morning once again to the gospel of John after kind of a three-month diversion into the book of Proverbs and other worthy topics of study from the Scriptures. When we left off back in September we were in the middle of a study of chapter five of John's Gospel.

Since it has been such a long time I want to begin this morning with a brief reminder of what is going on in chapter five. You will remember that this whole narrative started when Jesus visited the pool of Bethesda and healed a man who had been sick for 38 years. Problem was, Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. This really upset the local religious authorities, so they come and confront Jesus about his lack of regard for the Sabbath. Of course, it wasn't that Jesus violated the Sabbath at all, but that He broke the rules of Jewish tradition about the Sabbath. In any case verse 18 tells us they were so angry with him about it that they intensified their resolve to kill Him; and not only because he was breaking the Sabbath, but because He was speaking in such a manner that made Himself equal with God.

Now, you might expect that being confronted by a group of leaders who carried the death penalty card in their hip pocket might be a little intimidating. But not for Jesus. When they confronted Him about his claims of deity He answered them directly and decisively. Let me offer a summary of what He said:

- I. I am equal with the Father in Deity (19-20)
- II. I am equal with the Father in Sovereignty: (21)
- III. I am equal with the Father in Authority: (22)
- IV. I am equal with the Father in Majesty: (23)
- V. I am with the Father in the believer's Security (24)
- VI. I am equal with the Father in Resurrection Power (v. 25-26)
- VII. I am equal to the Father in Judgment (27-29)

Now for those who assert that Jesus never claimed to be God, this has got to be a maddening text. You can't take John Chapter 5 seriously and come to any other conclusion. Jesus was claiming to be God – co-equal with the Father in every way.

That brings us now to verse 30 where we find our text for this morning.

Read John 5:30-47

Jesus understands that the Pharisees are not going to be won over simply by His verbal claims of deity. So, as if He were a lawyer making a case in court, Jesus calls witnesses to the stand to

testify to the fact that His claims are true. In fact I believe there are five (5) witnesses that Jesus appeals to in this passage.

It's important to note that Jesus' tone here is not simply one of forensic persuasion but of moral condemnation. The gloves are off. He's not pulling any punches with the religious authorities. He hitting them fast and hard. Why? Because he is determined to confront and expose their unbelief. And I think in the process, He is also out to confront and expose our unbelief as well.

Can we just be honest for a minute? It may not be pleasant to admit this but just because I am a true child of God doesn't mean I don't struggle with unbelief. In fact, I have to battle unbelief in my life every day. I am not speaking of theological unbelief. I am absolutely convinced that Jesus is God. Its not theological unbelief that we wrestle with, but practical unbelief. In other words, sometimes there is a dichotomy in my life between believing in Jesus and trusting Jesus with the practical decisions of my life. We might say that sometimes our functional theology often misses the mark of our formal theology. So as we are thinking about the strong language Jesus uses in confronting the Pharisees' unbelief, let's remember that this text also confronts our unbelief as well.

My goal in this message is to talk about how to battle unbelief on our lives. In fact, there are three things I hope we will learn today. If we are going to be successful in battling unbelief in our own lives. First, we need to ...

I. Feel Jesus' Condemnation of Unbelief:

1. The reason I am suggesting that we need to feel Jesus' condemnation of unbelief is because *we tend to be insensitive to our own unbelief*. We need to feel something of how serious unbelief is in the eyes of God. So let's begin working through this text.

2. In verses 30-32 Jesus is simply acknowledging what the law of God required in any court case; namely, that verbal claims are not enough to establish one's guilt or innocence. There must be evidence. So the evidence Jesus is going to offer is the evidence of *NOT* just two witnesses (which was the minimum number the Law required) but five witnesses to that will attest to His deity.

A-1). John the Baptist.

1). Read v. 33

2). You will remember that God sent John the Baptist to serve as the promised forerunner to the Messiah. And you may remember that back in John 1:19-29 that the Jews had actually sent a delegation to John the Baptist to see if he was the Messiah. He explained that He was not the Christ, but rather a voice in the wilderness crying, "Make strait the way of the Lord..." Then, on the next day he identified Jesus publically saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

3). You see, the Jews believed that John was a real prophet. Jesus even says here in v. 35 that they rejoiced for a while in his light. They were glad that God had finally sent a real prophet after 400 years of silence. But they should have paid better attention to the

primary message of this prophet. He came for the express purpose of announcing that the Promised Messiah had come!

- 4). Now, Jesus didn't need any human witness to establish His true identity. But notice Jesus' reason for appealing to John. He says, "'the testimony I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.'
- 5). So John is the first witness to Jesus' deity is John the Baptist.

B-2). Jesus' own works:

- 1). Read v. 36
- 2). You see, the Jews should have concluded that Jesus was God simply by observing his works. His miracles. His life of perfect righteousness, His indomitable wisdom, and later his crucifixion and resurrection.
- 3) You may remember that when John the Baptist had questions about Jesus identity he sent an envoy with the question and Jesus responded by saying, (Mat. 11:5), Go tell John what you see; "*the* BLIND RECEIVE 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. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."
- 4) The third witness that Jesus appeals to is

C-3. The Father:

- 1) Read 37-38
- 2) We know that three times during Jesus' life God the Father spoke from heaven – at His baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and when the Greeks came to see Jesus just before His crucifixion. They had to have heard about at least two of these events. The Father's witness about the identity of His Son was unmistakable.

D-4. The Scriptures:

- 1) Read 39
- 2) The Pharisees and scribes were serious students of the God's word, but they studied it for the wrong reason; They thought that they could earn their salvation by devoted study of Scripture. Paul confesses this about his own life in Rom. 7:19; Gal. 3:21 where he explains that the Law was not given to impart life. You see, studying the Bible doesn't save anyone. Learning truth as an end in itself only leads to pride. The Scriptures were given so that we might come to know God. But the Jewish leaders completely missed this.
- 3) Jesus words here should remind us of the story in Luke 24 where the resurrected Christ appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and "explained to them the things concern Himself in all the Scriptures" (Lk. 24:27). If the Jews had been studying the Scriptures to discover how they could truly know God, they would recognized Jesus when He came.

E-5. Moses:

- 1) Read 45-47

- 2) You have to understand that the Jewish leaders held the writings of Moses in such high reverence it really bordered on worship. They loved Moses. Everyone revered Moses. Even the Samaritans regarded Moses as their heavenly intercessor. Moses was the one upon whom they had “set their hope.” Not the Father. Not His Messiah, but Moses. And Jesus has the audacity to say to them that on the Day of Judgment. It would *NOT* be He who accuses them, but Moses.
- 3) This must have hit them like a bolt of lightning. If any of Jesus’ accusations were offensive to them, this would have been the worst.

3. The important thing to observe here, is Jesus’ utter condemnation of their unbelief. In spite of all this evidence; in spite of the testimony of not two but five incontrovertible witnesses, the Jewish leaders refused to believe.

4. Notice how Jesus puts it:

A. (38) “You do not have His word abiding in you...” Why? “Because you do not believe in the One He has sent.” This is amazing! These were the men who studied the word of God more than anyone, and yet the word never made it into their hearts. If it had, they would have believed.

B. (40) “You are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life.” Now this really hits the core of the problem. John Piper rightly points out that the phrase “you are unwilling” would be better translated, “*You do not want* to come to me.” This is a shocking statement! Jesus is saying that the reason the Pharisees didn’t believe in Jesus was not because they didn’t have enough evidence that He was God, but because *they didn’t want Him*.

C. (41) Read 41. In other words, despite all your religious costumes, traditions, and rituals the reality is You don’t really love God. You don’t believe in me because you don’t want me, and the reason you don’t want me is because you don’t really love God.

5. Beloved, do you feel Jesus’ condemnation of unbelief? Jesus is saying,

- (38) You don’t have God’s word in you.
- (40) You don’t want to come to me
- (42) You don’t love God
- (43) You don’t receive me
- (44) You cannot believe me.
- (46-47) You don’t believe Moses and you don’t believe me.¹

6. If you want to conquer unbelief in your own life, you have to feel the weight of Jesus’ condemnation of unbelief. Second, you must...

II. Discover the Cause of Unbelief:

¹ Adapted from John Piper, *The Love of Human Praise as the Root of Unbelief*, sermon on John 5 at <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/the-love-of-human-praise-as-the-root-of-unbelief>

1. At this point we have to ask, why? Why didn't the Pharisees *want* their Messiah? And why did Jesus accuse them of not loving God? The answer is in verse 44. (Read 44).

A. "How can you believe" is a rhetorical question. The expected answer is, "you cannot." That is, you cannot believe in Me when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory of God.

Of the Pharisees Jesus said (Mat. 23:5–7) "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*.⁶ "They love the place of honor at banquets and the *chief seats in the synagogues*,⁷ and *respectful greetings* in the market places, and *being called Rabbi* by men."

B. You see, the root problem here was that what they *really wanted* and what they *really loved* was the praise of men. They wanted to be liked, approved of, accepted, honored, appreciated. They didn't desire Jesus because *another desire ruled their hearts*; namely, the applause of men.

C. This helps us understand verse 43 (Read 43). Why would they have received someone who came in their own name? Because that kind of Messiah would have been just like them. He would be a self-centered, praise loving, hypocrite who would have fit right in with the likes of the religious leaders.

2. Beloved, our desires are powerful. Nothing has more power to blind us to our unbelief like the desire for the approval of others and the fear of being rejected.

- Why do we hesitate to share the gospel? Fear of man.
- Why do we fail to confront sin in others when necessary? Fear of rejection.
- Why do we choose not to pray in public? Love of approval
- Why do we talk so much about our personal ambitions and accomplishment? Love of admiration and praise.
- Beyond that there are a thousand other desires that have the capacity to rule us and blind us to our own unbelief.
- Insert Bill Petite's story of the man who asked for instruction in Japanese because his church sent him to Japan believing he had the gift of tongues.

3. I recently heard a story on the radio about a woman who worked to promote the abortion industry. She admitted to a friend that she thought late-term abortions were evil and disgusting, but she continues to lobby for the right of this procedure just the same. Why? She confessed that she did it because she feared being rejected by her colleagues and friends in the movement.

4. What keeps people from trusting in Christ more than anything else is not a lack of evidence, but personal desires that rule them; desires that are threatened by presence of Jesus Christ. This is why the N.T. has so many warnings about the dangers of being ruled by our desires. The N.T. authors called them:

- Intense desires (Rom. 1:27)
- Enslaving desires (Gal. 4:9)
- Fleshly desires (Gal. 5:16)
- Deceitful desires (Eph. 4:22)
- Evil desires (Col. 3:5)
- Sensual desires (1 Tim. 5:11)
- Harmful desires (1 Tim. 6:9)
- Worldly desires (Tit. 2:12)
- Corrupt desires (2 Pet. 2:10)

4. And if we are honest, beloved, we will have to admit that these are the very desires that tend to lead us into all kinds of *functional unbelief*. Part of the human problem is that we are hard-wired to be addicted to the glory of men rather than loving the glory of God.

5. So if we want to conquer unbelief in our lives, we need to feel Jesus' condemnation of unbelief. We need to discover the cause of unbelief. And finally, we need to...

III. Apply the Cure for Unbelief:

1. What is the cure for unbelief? Clearly the opposite of unbelief is faith. But faith is an active thing. A passive faith will not help you battle against man-pleasing unbelief. It must be rigorous, active, and intentional.

2. I imagine there are some hearing my voice who have never trusted Christ. You have never really believed His claims to be God. Today I want to plead with you to think deeply about why. Is it really because of a lack of evidences and proof, or is it simply because you don't want anyone – not even God – telling you what to do? Can I just let you in on a secret that the world doesn't know about? Its far better to be ruled by Jesus Christ than by the impulses and desires of your heart.

3. If you are already a child of God by faith, I want to encourage you to admit the truth. Confess that you frequently are guilty of *functional unbelief*. Its not that you deny the deity of Christ, but you sometimes find yourself choosing to think and do what you know displeases God. And many times you do it either to please people or out of fear that you will be rejected by them. In the moment, we do it because it feels like it will make us happy. But that's not the way to true happiness, joy, and contentment in this life is found.

4. We gossip because we think it will win us friends. We complain because we think it will garner pity from others. We laugh at godless humor because we don't want to awstricized from the group. But you see, we learn from Jesus that we don't need the praise of men. What we should live for is the pleasure of God. The question is *NOT* "How can I find acceptance with the

people around me, but how can I please the Lord. That's where real joy, security, and peace are found.

4. David said (Psa. 37:4) "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 36 says that he has prepared a feast for us in his house and grants us to drink of the river of His delights.

5. What we need in the battle against man-pleasing unbelief is not something mystical or even unusual. The way we fight unbelief is with the faith of obedient love.

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