

The Gospel of John (79); False and True Believers

Introduction:

At the end of our Lord's public ministry as recorded in John's Gospel, we read of a kind of summary of His teaching and of the responsibility that people have to hear, believe, and live according to what He had taught them. In these final public words our Lord affirms both the eternal blessedness of the one who believes Him and His words, but also the everlasting ruin of those who fail or refuse to believe on Him. He also asserted that all honor and faith rendered unto Him is honor and faith rendered onto His Father, for He came on His behalf; He came in His stead.

Here is **John 12:42-50** from the New King James Version.

⁴²Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. ⁴⁵And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. ⁴⁶I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. ⁴⁷And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. ⁴⁹For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. ⁵⁰And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

The themes set forth in these verses have already been presented in earlier places of this fourth Gospel. But that they are set forth here at the end of our Lord's public ministry gives a point of exclamation to all that He has taught both publicly and privately.

The emphasis on the fact that God Himself stands behind Jesus—whether as the object of faith or as the condemning judge—encourages the most serious consideration of the claims of Christ advanced to this point, and injects urgency into the Evangelist's reflections on unbelief.¹

As we attempt to understand and digest this passage we may consider...

1. Some of the Jewish rulers who "believed" in Him (12:42f)
2. The one who truly believes in Jesus (12:44-46)
3. The one who does not believe in Jesus (12:47-48)
4. Our Lord's concluding assertion that He was speaking the words of the Father (12:49f)

I. Many of the Jewish rulers who "believed" in Him (12:42f)

Throughout John's Gospel we have read of the unbelieving and unrighteous Jewish leaders who had opposed Jesus. It would be quite easy to conclude that there was united opposition to Jesus by all the Jews in authority in Jerusalem. But **verses 42 and 43** correct this possible misapprehension, for here we read that

¹ Donald Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 451.

“even among the rulers many believed in Him many believed in Him.” But there is something is quite faulty regarding their faith. For John tells us that these “believers” had failed or refused to “confess Him.” Again, John wrote of these Jewish rulers:

⁴²Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote of these “believers”:

It may be thought that he speaks incorrectly, when he separates faith from confession; for with the heart we believe to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10) and it is impossible that the faith, which has been kindled in the heart, shall not put forth its flame. I reply, he points out here how weak was the faith of those men who were so lukewarm, or rather cold. In short, John means that they embraced the doctrine of Christ, because they knew that it had come from God, but that they have not a lively (living) faith, or a faith so vigorous as it ought to have been; for Christ does not grant to His followers a spirit of fear, but of firmness, that they may boldly and fearlessly confess what they have learned from Him. Yet I do not think that they were altogether silent; but as their *confession* was not sufficiently open, the Evangelist, in my opinion, simply declares that they did not make profession of their faith; for the proper kind of profession was, openly to declare that they were the disciples of Christ. Let no man, therefore, flatter himself who, in any respect, conceals or dissembles his faith for fear of incurring the hatred of men; for however hateful the name of Christ may be, that cowardice which compels us to turn aside, in the smallest degree, from the confession of him, admits of no excuse.²

If these Jewish rulers had stood forth and stated openly that what Jesus had taught was true and that what He had done proved that He was the promised Messiah, their open confession would have resulted in them being excluded from the synagogue. What generated this fear of open confession was that they “loved” the praise of men more than the praise of God. It would seem that they did love the praise of God, but they loved the praise of other men more, so they failed to confess Jesus openly and forthrightly. Jesus had said of some like them 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?”

The question that must be raised regarding these “many rulers” who believed: ***Was their faith saving faith?*** From the tenor of John’s description of these men the answer is “No, these men did not possess saving faith in Jesus Christ.” Their *belief* was defective and deficient, for they failed to confess Christ. John had written of others who had a shallow, false faith. We read in **John 2:22f**:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, ²⁵and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

There was a man who had confessed Christ openly, the man who had been born blind but to whom Jesus gave sight. But his confession of faith cost him. We read of him in John 9:33 boldly declaring before the Jewish leaders: “If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” But their response to him was excommunication from the professing people of God. We read in John 9:34f, “They answered and said to him, ‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’ ***And they cast him out.***” But even his own parents failed to confess Christ. When asked about their son and how he had sight given to him, they said, “He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself” (9:21). Then John gave an explanation of their response: “His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’”

² John Calvin, **Calvin’s Commentaries**, Vol. XVIII (Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 45f.

We also read of our Lord speaking of superficial “believers” in John 8:31f. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” Here it is quite clearly stated that there were those who “believed” Him, but their faith may not have yet led them to commit themselves to be Jesus’ disciples. They had faith, but it was not saving faith unless and until it moved them to become committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

And so, it is quite clear that these ones who “believed in Him” in John 12:42f did not manifest saving faith. Here are the words of **Donald Carson**:

The leaders themselves (same word as in 3:1) seem at this point to fit the pattern of inadequate, irresolute, even spurious (false) faith that John repeatedly describes in this Gospel (e.g. 2:23-25; 6:60; 8:30ff). Nicodemus was willing to stand up for Jesus in the Sanhedrin (7:50-52); he and Joseph of Arimathea publicly identified themselves with Jesus’ cause by providing decent burial for Him. Doubtless there were other leaders, less courageous even than this, who maintained some distant attachment to Jesus, who believed in Him in some sense, of whose faith the Pharisees knew nothing (7:48). Sadly, their faith was still so weak that they would not take any step that would threaten their position in the synagogue; *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*, and therefore fell under Jesus’ searing indictment (5:44), here repeated by the Evangelist (cf. Matt. 6:1-21; Rom. 2:29)... Almost certainly the Evangelist knew of Jews and proselytes in his day who were happy enough to believe in Jesus in some sense, but who displayed similar hesitations. He wants them to know such secret faith will not do.³

There is much “faith” like this in our world today. There are those who will “confess” Christ on Sunday, when they are in their church buildings with others who similarly “believe”, but they fail, even refuse, to confess Christ on Monday, when they are before others, when it might cost them, in that others would think less of them if they did so.

True saving faith is more than simply being convinced of who Jesus is and what He did on behalf of sinners, a faith that one has and keeps to himself only. Saving faith is more than just claiming to trust Jesus alone as Lord and Savior, even believing that through Jesus’ death on the cross alone is the basis of hope of salvation. Saving faith is evidenced by commitment and confession. True saving faith is seen in one’s confession of Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior as shown forth in one’s life commitment to follow Jesus Christ in faith and obedience before the world.

These men “believed in Him”, but they would not “confess” Him, for they were more concerned to have the praise of men than the praise of God. They did not have saving faith. **J. C. Ryle** wrote of how common this spiritual malady has infected the hearts of many who claim to be Christian:

We may learn from these verses, *the amazing power which the love of the world has over men*. We read that “among the chief rulers many believed on Christ: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

These unhappy men were evidently convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah. Reason, and intellect and mind, and conscience, obliged them secretly to admit that no one could do the miracles which He did, unless God was with Him, and that the preacher of Nazareth really was the Christ of God. But they had not courage to confess it. They dared not face the storm of ridicule, if not persecution, which confession would have entailed. And so, like cowards, they held their peace, and kept their convictions to themselves.

Their case, it may be feared, is a sadly common one. There are thousands of people who know far more in religion than they act up to. They know they ought to come forward as decided Christians. They know that they are not living up to their light. But the fear of man keeps them back. They are afraid of being laughed at, jeered at, and despised by the world. They dread losing the good opinion of society, and the favorable judgment of men and women like themselves. And they go on from year to year, secretly ill

³ Carson, pp. 450f.

at ease and dissatisfied with themselves,--knowing too much of religion to be happy in the world, and clinging too much to the world to enjoy religion (i.e. true Christianity).⁴

The Lord requires public confession of faith in Him. Paul declared this forthrightly in Romans 10. Here he contrasted what the Law of Moses taught, "Do this so that you may live", with what the gospel declares, "Believe the gospel and you will live." But then he declared that this faith in Christ must be confessed:

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): ***that 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.*** ¹⁰***For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*** ¹¹For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Rom. 10:5-13)

The faith that saves the soul from eternal hell that receives the gift of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness that entitles the sinner to eternal life, is a faith that confesses Christ openly before others. And of course the primary way that the Word of God declares the believer should confess his faith in Christ openly and publicly is through believer's baptism by immersion. The one who stands forward to be baptized, if he is doing so biblically, is confessing his own sinfulness and that he is deserving of death, but that he is trusting Jesus Christ alone who died and rose for him, the sinner, and that He, Jesus Christ, is his only hope for salvation. At the same time his baptism is an open confession before the church and before the world that he is resolved by the grace of God to walk in faith and obedience to Jesus as Lord alongside his fellow believers in the church of Jesus Christ.

But sadly, the fear of man will commonly keep a person from this vital action that substantiates one's faith as true and saving in nature. Here is the remedy:

Faith is the only cure for the soul ailments like this. A believing view of an unseen God, and unseen Christ, an unseen heaven, and unseen judgment day,--this is the grand secret for overcoming the fear of man. The expulsive power of a new principle is required to heal the disease. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Let us pray for faith, if we would conquer those deadly enemies of souls, the fear of man and the love of man's praise. And if we have any faith, let us pray for more. Let our daily cry be, "Lord, increase our faith." We may easily have too much money, or too much worldly prosperity. But we can never have too much faith.⁵

What is keeping you from confessing your faith in Jesus Christ openly before the world? Can you claim ignorance of the truths of the gospel? Perhaps a few here could do so. But there are others who could not claim ignorance. Or is it cowardness? Or perhaps you are mindful of what a commitment would cost you and require of you, and you harbor other desires and plans in your heart that you know would have to be abandoned if you got serious about becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ? Or is it due to the spiritual malady that characterized these men--the fear of man--what others will think of you? May the Lord implant within your soul a greater desire and delight in your soul for the "praise of God" than the "praise of men."

Do not be ashamed of Christ! Embrace Him! Confess Him! Receive the promises of Christ of those who do. Jesus said,

⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 407f.

⁵ Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2, p. 408.

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.
²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.
²⁵For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? ²⁶***For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.***”

Think of that, to have Jesus Christ ashamed of you at the last judgment, when all eternity lies before you! He will be ashamed of you then, because you were ashamed of Him here and now! The early 19th century evangelist, **Asahel Nettleton** (1783-1844), wrote regarding these words:

Shame is a very powerful passion. Its influence over mankind is universal. It entered the world by sin, and it ought to be exercised towards nothing else. But strange to tell, that very weapon which ought to be turned against sin, is now turned against religion (Christianity) itself.

That some should be frightened into a denial of Christ, is not so incredible. But that any be *ashamed of Him*, whom angels adore, is what we could not have believed without the clearest evidence. But proof is not wanting (lacking) to establish the fact, that many are now ashamed of Christ. Our Savior who delivered the warning in the text, was perfectly acquainted with all the secret feelings of the human heart; and sad experience has too often proved the propriety of this solemn warning...

Bring this subject, my hearers, home to your hearts. How do you feel when you know that others are ashamed of *you*? Suppose one of your companions should be ashamed to own an acquaintance with you—should blush and hide his face at the bare mention of your name—should flee at your approach—and should bolt and bar the door lest he be disgraced by your society. To be treated thus by your equal would be trying. To be treated this way by your best friend would be heart-rending. But this is nothing. Christ, the friend of sinners, who groaned and died on the cross to save you, will be ashamed of you! Let all your friends—Let them cast out your name as evil—Let them point and hoot at you as you pass along the streets... But to have Christ ashamed of you—who can bear it?⁶

Before we move on, consider the words of this old hymn, “***Jesus, and It Shall Ever Be***”:

Jesus, and shall it ever be,
A mortal man, ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise,
Whose glories shine through endless days?

Ashamed of Jesus! that dear friend
On whom my hopes of Heav’n depend!
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere His name.

Ashamed of Jesus! yes, I may
When I’ve no guilt to wash away;
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fears to quell, no soul to save.

Ashamed of Jesus! empty pride!
I’ll boast a Savior crucified,
And O may this my portion be,
My Savior not ashamed of me!⁷

⁶ Asahel Nettleton, **Asahel Nettleton: Sermons from the Second Great Awakening** (International Outreach, 1995), pp. 261, 271.

⁷ This was our hymn of the month in February of 2019.

II. The one who truly believes in Jesus (12:44-46)

After John described these ones who failed to confess Christ, He cites Christ's words regarding those who truly believed on Him. Here are **verses 44** through **46**.

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. ⁴⁵And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. ⁴⁶I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

Some have thought that John's interjection of Jesus speaking here is somewhat awkward, for just a little before John declared, "These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them" (12:36). But John uses our Lord's words here to give a conclusion to His public ministry. As **Edward Klink** stated: "But this reappearance by Jesus makes for an emphatic and climatic 'final appeal to believe,' not only for the crowd listening but also for the reader of the Gospel. Just as the departure and concealment of Jesus was intentionally cryptic (v. 36), so also is Jesus' reappearance for a final exhortation of the people."⁸

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000) also emphasized the summary nature of our Lord's words in these verses. After speaking of the content in the remaining chapters of John's Gospel, he wrote:

This makes the verses that end chapter 12 particularly important; for in them John sums up what Jesus has said and done and reflects upon it, thereby also commending the teachings of Christ to any who may not yet be Christians. This has been true of all these final verses, of course, beginning with verse 37; but it is particularly true of the verses to which we come now. These last verses (vs. 44-50) contain what we can only call a resume of Christ's teaching. These are not the last words Christ spoke publicly—the last words He spoke publicly are recorded in verses 35 and 36—but they are the final summation of His teaching.⁹

The verb that John used in verse 44 to describe Jesus speaking is "cried out." "Then Jesus cried out and said..." It serves to accentuate the importance of what it is He was declaring. John had used this verb with Jesus before. We read in John 7:28f,

Then *Jesus cried out*, as He taught in the temple, saying, "You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. ²⁹But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me."

And also farther down in that chapter we read, "

³⁷On the last day, that great day of the feast, *Jesus stood and cried out*, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 12:37f)

The verb is used in a special way by John to set forth "inspired speech."

With this introduction, the final public statement of Jesus is rendered more emphatic. In a sense, this concluding statement is like an encore, a reappearance in order to make one final exhortative statement. The "cry" of Jesus here is a cry of the merciful and gracious God, calling the reader—the world—to repentance. Such a call matches the purpose of the entire Gospel (see 20:30-31).¹⁰

⁸ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 561.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, **The Gospel of John, Vol. 3: Those Who Received Him, John 9-12** (Baker Books, 1985, 1999), pp. 987f.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 562.

Here, then, we see the boldness in which our Lord Jesus proclaimed truth to the world into which He was sent. Whereas there were some who had “believed”, who were afraid to own Him and His words, He was unafraid to declare His words to the people at large. “Though they had not courage openly to profess faith in His doctrine, He had courage openly to publish it; if they were ashamed of it, He was not, but set His face as a flint” (Matthew Henry).

In a sense, Jesus summarized His entire ministry, calling people to believe on God by believing in Him. **“Then Jesus cried out and said, ‘He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.’”** Although Jesus called upon people to believe on Him, that faith would not detract from the glory of His Father. To believe in Jesus was to believe in His Father, for His Father had sent Him and everything Jesus did and said, He did in the Father’s name. To be Christocentric—Christ-centered—is to be Theocentric--God-centered.

Note that Jesus did not on this occasion refer directly to His Father as Father, but rather, He referred to “Him who sent Me.” Our faith in God is seen in our faith in Jesus Christ. As we look unto Christ in faith, we look beyond Him in faith to the Father who had sent Him to do all that He did on our behalf for our benefit. Some terminate their faith in Jesus Christ, without looking through Him to His Father. Jesus said, “Believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). There are even some who set the Son against the Father, as though they are working at cross purposes: “The Father is against us, but Jesus who is for us won Him over to us.” This is error. Our faith in Jesus Christ is also faith in His Father, for He has sent the Savior in the world to redeem us from our sin.

What Jesus said here, He also said at other times, as recorded in the Synoptics. We read in **Matthew 10:40**, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Similarly we read in **Luke 9:48**, “Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” And in **Luke 10:16** we read, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” “And so closely is the Son, the Word, identified with the Father (1:1, 18), that to see Jesus is to see the Father who sent Him (cf. 14:9).”¹¹

This statement of Jesus in verses 44 and 45 underscores once again the deity of Jesus Christ. If we see God the Father when we see Jesus Christ, it means that Jesus Christ must also be God.

“The importance of the deity of Jesus Christ is that we know God only in Him; and if the Lord Jesus is not God, then we do not know what God is like because we have no basis for saying anything about Him.”¹²

We then read of our Lord’s declaration in **verse 46**, **“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”** We addressed this matter quite extensively earlier in chapter 12:35-36, in which it is recorded,

Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

When Jesus said, “**I have come** as a light **into** the world”, He was alluding to His divine preexistence as the eternal begotten Son of God and of His incarnation. He came into the world by assuming our human nature (body and soul), becoming Jesus of Nazareth, the God/Man. He came in order to reveal God to us and enable us to live in the “light” of that knowledge of Him. He came into the world to provide “light”, that is, knowledge and understanding of who God is and what God is like. He did so that this world would not continue in “darkness”, which suggests a world ignorant and unaware of the true God.

The true Christian, the one who believes in Jesus Christ God’s Son, has been given an understanding of the truth of who God is and what He is like. He lives in faith according to this truth of God that he has

¹¹ Carson, p. 452.

¹² Boice, **John**, vol. 3, p. 998.

seen in Christ and has learned from Him. The one who believes in Him no longer abides in darkness, but lives in the light of God's glory. But what of the one who is not a true Christian? Jesus next addressed that one.

III. The one who does not believe in Jesus (12:47-48)

⁴⁷And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

The same Light that brings life to those who believe, damns those who fail or refuse to believe. The Lord Jesus did not come into the world with the purpose to judge the world, but because of His coming and of the great blessing that is available for sinners through Him, those who refuse or fail to believe on Him do condemn themselves. The Word proclaimed by Jesus brings great responsibility and accountability to its hearers. To whom much is given, much will be required. And so, even though our Lord Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it, nevertheless, those who rejected Him, refusing to believe on Him, were judged due to His words.

John Calvin wrote of our Lord and His dealings with these ones in their unbelief.

After having spoken concerning His grace, and exhorted His disciples to steady faith, He now begins to strike the rebellious, though even here He mitigates the severity due to the wickedness of those who deliberately -- as it were -- reject God; for He delays to pronounce *judgment* on them, because, on the contrary, He has come for the salvation of all. In the first place, we ought to understand that He does not speak here of all unbelievers without distinction, but of those who, knowingly and willingly, reject the doctrine of the gospel which has been exhibited to them. Why then does Christ not choose to condemn them? It is because He lays aside for a time the office of a *judge*, and offers salvation to all without reserve, and stretches out His arms to embrace all, that all may be the more encouraged to repent. And yet there is a circumstance of no small moment, by which He points out the aggravation of the crime, if they reject an invitation so kind and gracious, for it is as if He had said, "Lo, I am here to invite all, and, forgetting the character of a judge, I have this as my single object, to persuade all, and to rescue from destruction those who are already twice ruined." No man, therefore, is condemned on account of having despised the gospel, except he who, disdainingly the lovely message of salvation, has chosen of his own accord to draw down destruction on himself.¹³

Let us consider a few details of these verses. First, **verse 47a** reads, "***And if anyone hears My words and does not believe...***" The Greek word translated here in the New King James Version as "believe" is not the word commonly used for "belief" in the New Testament.¹⁴ The English Standard Version (ESV) has a better translation of this Greek word, which is "keep." It reads, "If anyone hears my words and does ***not keep*** them..." To keep carries the idea of not just believing His words, but embracing and preserving them so as not to lose them, as say, watching over His words as treasures to guard. In fact, in other places of the New Testament this Greek word is translated as "guard." Here are two examples: "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and ***guard*** you against the evil one." (2 Thess. 3:3, ESV). And this verse: "But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able ***to guard*** until that day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Tim. 1:12, ESV). And so, the unbeliever that Jesus was speaking of here in verse 47 is one who does not value His Words and therefore make no effort to retain them or treasure them.

¹³ Calvin, vol. XVIII, p. 50.

¹⁴ The Greek word commonly translated as "believe" is Πιστεύω (*pisteuō*), but here the word is φυλάξῃ (*fulaxay*). It is better translated as "keep" or "guard."

Instead of valuing the gift and treasure offered him, this man treats it as worthless treasure offered him, this man treats it as worthless and throws it aside as something he does not want. To him the gold of Jesus' "sayings" is counterfeit coin. He does not hold tightly to it and see that it does not slip away from him or is snatched or lured from him.¹⁵

After speaking of the one who does not keep or guard the words of Jesus that have been taught him, Jesus declared, "I do not judge Him." What He means is that at that time during His first coming He had not come to judge them, or the world. Jesus said, "I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." In one respect Jesus did not need to judge the world, for the world had already been judged and found to be condemned. And for another, there lie a day in the future when God's judgment would be administered to the world and all of its inhabitants. It is as though Jesus said:

"I for my part do not judge him (the unbeliever)." The emphatic ἐγὼ (*ego*, meaning "I") implies that another will attend to this. But Jesus is speaking of Himself as at the same time being engaged in His mission ("He that did send Me," vs. 44, 45). So the reason why He on His part is not judging is that He did not come into the world for this purpose. The world did not need judgment (Rom. 5:16), it already had that; it needed saving with all that lies in this mighty concept σωζειν (*sozain*, "to save")—compare 3:17—especially the idea of rescue from mortal danger and of being placed in permanent safety.¹⁶

And so, the words that Jesus taught that would give salvation and eternal life to any and all who believed and kept those words, would one day confirm unbelievers in their damnation.

Jesus then declared in **verse 48**, "*who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*" There is one subject but there are two objects in this sentence. The subject, "who", does two things. He rejects the person of Jesus ("who rejects Me") and He does not receive Jesus' words. They go hand-in-hand. One cannot accept Jesus apart from also receiving **His words**. And if and when one rejects the person of Jesus or fails to receive His words, he has that to judge or damn him on the future Day of Judgment, even the last day. And of course, when we speak of the words of our Lord Jesus that we are to believe and keep, we rightly apply this to all of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments. All the Bible is the Word of God. All the words of Scripture are the words of Jesus Christ (cf. John 5:39).

Note here that Jesus made a reference to the final judgment on the "last day." This is the sixth occasion in John's Gospel that this phrase is used. Jesus made reference to "the last day" four times in John 6 (vs. 39, 40, 44, 54). Each of those occasions refer to the day of resurrection, or full salvation of God's elect. Martha spoke of "the last day" in telling Jesus that she knew that her dead brother, Lazarus, would be raised from the dead on her last day (John 11:24). And here, Jesus speaks of the "last day." But here Jesus was speaking of the unbeliever being condemned in the final judgment on "the last day." We believe the Bible teaches that there is a single day in the future when all people will be raised and brought before the judgment seat of Christ and will be judged according to their works, the outcome of which is either salvation or damnation. We do not believe that the Bible speaks of a 1007 year separation in time between the judgment of the elect and the judgment of the damned. There is a single day in the future upon which Jesus will judge all humanity. Here Jesus said that His words heard but not received, will condemn the unbeliever on that Day of Judgment.

"The Word" as the majestic expression of the eternal will of Jesus shall be the disbeliever's judge. This Word which Jesus spoke the disbeliever heard from the lips and through the voice of Jesus. It will thus be a mighty familiar judge whom the disbeliever confronts at the last day. If there is any surprise, it will be his at meeting again this Word that he spurned in life. It decides his fate now ("the one that is

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), pp. 895f.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 896.

engaged in judging him”), although that fate may yet be changed while life lasts; but when life is done, the final verdict is reached, which will be proclaimed in public at the last day before the universe of angels and of men. What a warning against disbelief!¹⁷

IV. Our Lord’s concluding assertion that He was speaking the words of the Father (12:49f)

⁴⁹For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. ⁵⁰And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

Our Lord Jesus is fully God and fully man. In the incarnation, the eternal second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, took upon Himself our human nature—both body and soul—and became Jesus Christ. He will forever be this one divine person with two natures, one divine and one human. When He came into this world, however, He had set aside His divine, infinite attributes, even as He submitted wholly in His human nature to God His Father. And so His earthly ministry was not a vivid demonstration of His divine attributes, for He had “emptied Himself”¹⁸ in the sense of refusing to call upon them in living, serving, and dying in order to be our Redeemer. He did not cease to be God, but He did choose not to display or manifest His divine nature through His life as our Savior. Rather, everything that He thought, spoke, and did, was as He was directed and instructed by His Father as He was empowered by the Holy Spirit. And here in John 12:49, Jesus declared that every word that He had taught had been dictated to Him by His Father. His Father had given Him the command as to what to say and when to say it. And so, the words of the Lord Jesus have the authority of God the Father, for they are one and the same.

“The final affirmation of the summary of Jesus’ proclamation reiterates His sending by the Father and the origin of His message in God. This has been a constant theme of the Gospel from the prologue on.”¹⁹

Lastly, when Jesus said, the Father who sent Me gave Me “a command” as to what to say and when to say it, and then He declared, “And I know that His command is everlasting life”, He was declaring the overarching commission of God His Father that He gave His Son upon entering the world. It is as if the Father said to Him: “Here is my command: Go. Bring and secure eternal life to a lost and damned world.”

“O LORD, you are our God;
we will exalt you; we will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
(Isaiah. 25:1)

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 897.

¹⁸ Phil. 2:6f: “though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, *but emptied Himself...*”

¹⁹ Cf. John 1:14-18; 3:31-36; 7:14-17; 8:26-29, and for v. 50a see also 3:16; 5:19-29, 39-40; 6:38-40, 68 in George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 218.