

The Gospel of John (53)

Introduction:

Let us give our attention to the next portion of our study of John's Gospel, which is **John 8:21-30**. Here is the New King James Version (NKJV) of this passage:

²¹Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."

²²So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I go you cannot come?'"

²³And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

²⁵Then they said to Him, "Who are You?"

And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. ²⁶I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him."

²⁷They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.

²⁸Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." ³⁰As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

The setting of these words of Jesus is the same as the previous passage that we addressed last Lord's Day. Jesus was in the temple speaking to the crowds. But in the verses we just read, the Lord was addressing more directly and specifically the Jewish leaders that were opposing Him. We see this from verse 22, in which John records the answer of "the Jews" to our Lord's first statement. In John's Gospel the term, "the Jews", is a reference to the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem who were opposed to Jesus and who had been seeking to murder Him.¹ In this exchange with these men, our Lord affirmed before them His identity, but in cloaked terms. We see the crucial importance of believing Who He is in truth and responding to Him in saving faith, in order to receive the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of eternal life. And yet we also read of the hopeless state of these men who were both unwilling to hear and understand the truth that Jesus was proclaiming in their hearing. It has been said of our Lord in this passage:

Christ here gives fair warning to the careless unbelieving Jews to consider what would be the consequence of their infidelity (unbelief), that they might prevent it before it was too late; for He spoke words of terror as well as words of grace. (Matthew Henry)

Let us first consider the meaning of the text. Then we will attempt to instruct us on how to hear the Word of God to our spiritual benefit.

¹ However Donald Carson believes that the term here, "the Jews", is a "reference to the crowds who are largely skeptical or confused, some of whom may believe in Him but even then only with unsatisfactory faith (vs. 31, 37)." Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 342.

I. The meaning of the text of John 8:21-30.

A. Jesus announced His departure (8:21, 22)

²¹Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”

²²So the Jews said, “Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come?’?”

Last Lord’s Day we gave attention to verses 11-20, in which we read in verse 21, “Then Jesus said to them *again*, ‘I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.’” And now we read today verse 21, “Then Jesus said to them *again*...” This indicates that our Lord was speaking to the same audience in the same location, but with perhaps somewhat of a pause in His speaking.²

The emphases that we read last week in verses 11 through 20 are repeated and enlarged upon throughout the remaining discourse of Jesus, which ends with the last verse of this chapter. Here is a summary of those themes:

The themes developed in verses 12-20 are enlarged upon throughout the rest of this chapter. They include: where Jesus comes from (vs. 23, 26, 29); where He is going (vs. 21, 22, 28); who the Father is (vs. 26-27, 38, 54-55); who Jesus is (vs. 23-26, 38, 54-55). Further, the opposite of each of these themes is applied to the Jews. Jesus is from above, they are from below; they are from this world, He is not of this world (v. 23); where He goes, they cannot come (v. 21); God is His Father, theirs is the devil (vs. 26-27, 41-44, 54-55).

Actually **verse 21** repeats largely what the Lord had declared in John 7: 33-34, which read,

Then Jesus said to them, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me.
³⁴You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”

However, there is some difference, in that verse 21 before us is more threatening. Again, it reads, “Jesus said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.’” Generally in John’s Gospel, when Jesus speaks of going away, He is referring to His death, burial, and resurrection, and then His return to His Father. He is suggesting that even after He dies upon the cross, they will be looking for a coming Messiah. They will be disappointed for He is the true one sent from God, and they failed to acknowledge Him. These unbelievers who will be looking for another other than Jesus, will be unable to go to heaven, where Jesus will have gone.

But these Jewish leaders know no more of our Lord now as they did then. They responded with a question to themselves. **Verse 22** reads, “*So the Jews said, ‘Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come?’*” They thought that Jesus was so out of touch with reality that He was perhaps suicidal. They seem to be mocking Him in this statement. Of verse 22 **Matthew Henry** wrote of “the jest they made of this threatening. Instead of trembling at this word, they bantered it, and turned it into ridicule: Will he kill himself? See here, what slight thoughts they had of Christ’s threatenings.” This suggestion on the part of the Jews was designed to slander Jesus, “since suicide in Judaism was abhorred and considered to be the act of an insane person.”³

² “As in v. 12, so here: the Greek word for ‘again’ (NIV *Once more*) indicates a pause, yet a fundamental continuity with what proceeds.” Carson, p. 341.

³ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 410. He cites Josephus as a reference for this: Josephus, **The Wars of the Jews**, 3.375.

Earlier the Jews had thought perhaps His going away was His intention to go to the *diaspora*, and even proclaim His message to the Gentiles (John 7:35). Here they suspect that He is contemplating suicide. Here is another instance of Johanine irony, as one declared, “Again the irony of the cross is at play.”⁴ No, He was not “going away” by committing suicide, but He was “going away” by His voluntary submitting to His death on the cross.

Here our Lord spoke graciously to them out of concern for their eternal well-being. But they were clueless. They would not hear. They could not understand. Now it is possible that we might be discouraged when we see this indifference and even hostility when we seek the well-being of others by telling them of the Savior. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) sought to encourage the servants of the Lord in their work:

Jesus said again unto them that which might be likely to do them good. He continued to teach, in kindness to those few who received his doctrine, though there were many that resisted it, which is an example to ministers to go on with their work, notwithstanding opposition, because a remnant shall be saved.

But then we see that...

B. Jesus denounced His detractors. (8:23, 24)

²³And He said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.”

Our Lord responded by telling them they are from two different realms in which there is nothing in common between them. “And He said to them, ‘You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.’” How could they even relate to Him since they were so contrary in nature? Our Lord was not of this world. Even when He lived in this world, His heart and mind were in another, in heaven with His Father. “He was perfectly dead to the wealth of the world, the ease of the body, and the praise of men, and was wholly taken up with divine and heavenly things; and none shall be with him but those who are born from above and have their conversation in heaven” (Matthew Henry). But how different were they from He! They had a worldly frame of mind and reference. Jesus said to them, “*You are from beneath*, and of this world.” What communion could be conducted and enjoyed between them? None. It is like He was saying to them, “We are from two different planets.” This is the reason for their inability to understand who He truly was, where He was going, and how He would be getting there.

The Lord said to them “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” We might think that the expression, “from beneath” is a reference to hell or the evil underworld. But here it is a reference to this fallen world. There are two realms, heaven above and earth beneath. That the world is “beneath” speaks of its degenerated moral and spiritual order, which is incapable and unwilling to understand and experience that which is “above”--heaven, and God who dwells there.

“Jesus and the Jews belong to two different worlds. The origin of Jesus is rooted in the identity of God, whereas the origin of “the Jews” is rooted in the identity of darkness, sin, and death (v. 21; cf. 1:5).⁵

Jesus declared to them, “I am from above.” Here is but one more occasion in which Jesus speaks of His eternal divine nature. He came down from above in His incarnation, when He, the eternal Son of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

God, took upon Himself our human nature, that being a physical body and a rational soul. He did not cease to be “from above”, that is, His divine nature was not transformed into that of a man. He took upon Himself in addition to His divine nature our human nature, in order to become our Prophet, our Priest, and our King. He became one of us to die in our place, to atone for our sins, so that we could be with Him who is once again above.

The contrast is not between a spiritual world and a material world (John is not a Neoplatonist⁶), but between the realm of God Himself and the realm of His fallen and rebellious creation, the ‘world’ which hates Jesus because He testifies that ‘what it does is evil’ (7:7). That is the fundamental reason why Jesus’ opponents can neither recognize who He is nor understand His teaching. Nothing will suffice to remove such blindness but being ‘taught by God’ (6:45), being born again (3:3, 5), finding the One who is Himself the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).⁷

Jesus’ words of pronouncement on these people is frightening. In **verse 24** we read, “*Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*” He already had declared their inability to believe on Him, for they were of this fallen world. There we have the total depravity of the human race revealed. The only way of escape from certain damnation, which results when dying in ones’ sins, is to believe what Jesus claimed: “I am He.” In this context it means that unless you believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, you will die in your sins and be damned in those sins.

By the way, you may have noticed that when we read verse 21 it made mention of the singular “sin”, but here in verse 24 we read of dying in your (plural) “sins.” The singular “sin” of verse 21 was probably addressing specifically their single sin of unbelief. But here in verse 24 the plural “sins” is referring to the totality of sins committed in this life. Those who die in their sins will be judged for those sins before the Lord Jesus whom God the Father has appointed to be the Judge of the world. Here are the words of **John Calvin** (1509-1564) on this matter:

Having formerly employed the singular number, *in your sin*, he now resorts to the plural number, *in your sins*; but the meaning is the same, except that in the former passage he intended to point out that unbelief is the source and cause of all evils. Not that there are no other sins but unbelief, or that it is unbelief alone which subjects us to the condemnation of eternal death before God, as some men too extravagantly talk; but because it drives us away from Christ, and deprives us of His grace, from which we ought to expect deliverance from all our sins. That the Jews reject the medicine with obstinate malice, is their mortal disease; and hence it arises that the slaves of Satan do not cease to heap up sins on sins, and continually to bring down upon themselves fresh condemnations.⁸

The expression, “I am *He*”, is the one that we have seen already and we have spoken about several times. This is the Greek clause, “**I Am.**” [Greek: Ἐγώ εἰμι (*ego aimie*)], which is Jesus claim to be God who revealed Himself to Moses through the burning bush. Although our English translations include the predicate nominative, “He”, it is actually not in the Greek text. It is though the Lord said to these people, “If you do not believe that **I Am**, you will die in your sins.”

As we have already indicated, there are seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John in which a predicate is added to the “I am”. They include the following:

⁶ A Neoplatonist was one who believed that this physical world is an emanation of the true spiritual world and that one must transcend this poor earthly sphere in order to be translated to the pure spiritual, heavenly sphere of existence.

⁷ Ibid, p. 342.

⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 319f.

- (1) “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)
- (2) “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5)
- (3) “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7, 9)
- (4) “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14)
- (5) “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)
- (6) “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)
- (7) “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 5)

We saw it last week in verse 12, when Jesus declared to them, “I am the light of the world.” Here He is stating that if they do not believe that He is God incarnate, they will die in their sins. We see, therefore, that faith in the true identity of Jesus is an essential element of saving faith. Not only must you believe, that is, trust in Him for what He has done—lived, died, rose again—but you must believe Him to be the true eternal God who came into this world assuming our human nature in order to die to atone for our sins.

Now, even though the expression, “I AM” is clear to us reading this Gospel, it was not quite as clear to those who heard Him at this moment. They questioned what He meant by this in the next verse. However, by the time we reach verses 58f they come to understand clearly that He was making the claim of being God and, therefore, they again sought to kill Him. There we read, “

⁵⁸Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

⁵⁹Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (John 8:58f)

Again, Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am He, you will die in your sins.**”

C. Jesus pronounced His identity, once again (8:25-27)

²⁵Then they said to Him, “Who are You?”

And Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. ²⁶I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.”

²⁷They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.

The Jews ask the question of Jesus quite directly, “Who are you?” They were not sure exactly what He was claiming for Himself, but they had their suspicions! The idea may be this: “Who are you to be saying and claiming such things?” “Who are you?”

Jesus’ response to them was to the point: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.’” Now to these Jews, they would probably have assumed that He was simply claiming to be the same one since they had first encountered Him, that He had been consistent before them in telling them who He was. But for the reader of this Forth Gospel, our Lord’s words would have had more full meaning. Jesus’ words, “from the beginning”, would have taken them back to John 1:1f, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.” But the readers of this Gospel would have then taken our Lord’s Words back farther. Jesus was God in the “beginning” of the creation, cited in Genesis 1:1. There it reads, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” They would have understood our Lord’s Words as but another assertion of His deity. As one wrote,

The term “the beginning” makes an “impression” upon the reader that is missed by “the Jews,” for the term speaks not merely of the “beginning” of Jesus’ ministry but also—and simultaneously—about Jesus the Creator, the One who was with God “in the beginning” (1:1-3)... Jesus was at the creation of the world that He had publically claimed to be since the beginning of His ministry; it was who He was at the very moment, standing before the Jews.⁹

The Lord then said to them in **verse 26**, “*I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.*” Our Lord said that He did indeed have many things to say that His Father would have Him say, which would most certainly entail a pronouncement of judgment upon them. But whatever He would declare to them, they may be assured that His words were the words that His Father gave Him to declare to the people. “Let them understand that in every word of warning and of judgment from the lips of Jesus they hear the word and verdict of His great Sender.”¹⁰

It is a sad thing that these Jews were clueless as to what He was saying to them. We read in **verse 27**, “*They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.*” The readers of this Gospel know exactly what Jesus meant when He spoke. But John revealed that these Jewish leaders were grossly spiritually errant and ignorant of what Jesus was saying to them. His words made no sense to them.

Now often times the inability of hearers to understand the words of a preacher standing before them is due to the failure of the preacher to communicate clearly and properly. But the problem of understanding is not always the fault of the speaker. It was never the fault of Jesus that the Jewish leaders failed to understand Him. The fault lie with them and their spiritual incapacity to comprehend, to “hear His words.” When we come to hear the Word of God on the Lord’s Day, it is very important that we put ourselves in a right frame of mind and a right condition of heart if we are to receive anything from the Lord. Yes, pray for me that I would speak rightly and clearly. But pray for yourself also that you would hear rightly and understand clearly. And if the Lord is pleased to bless, then we will both feel right and good about the matter. We will speak more to this matter in a few minutes.

D. Jesus declared His confidence that the Father was with Him (8:28-29)

²⁸Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”

Jesus again spoke of His crucifixion which would be the way and the means of returning to His Father in heaven and there to be exalted by Him. **Verse 28** reads, “*Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.’*” Let us attempt to break these words down for our clarity of understanding.

First, when Jesus said, “*When you lift up the Son of Man*”, He was referring to His crucifixion. They would “lift up” the Son of Man, that is, He, the promised Messiah, would be crucified by them. But in doing so they would unwittingly be exalting Him, glorifying Him before the Father, for the Father had sent Him to do that very thing, to die for the sins of His people. Our Lord’s cross was His step stool to His throne. But this does not mean that His cross was only the means to His glorification. His cross, too, was His glorification. “The exaltation of Jesus by means of the cross is also the exaltation of Jesus on the cross.”¹¹

⁹ Klink, p. 411.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 618.

¹¹ Carson, p. 345.

Jesus said that when this event takes place, “*then you will know that I am He.*” This statement, “I am *He*”, is identical to what we read in verse 24. There Jesus declared to them, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am (He)**, you will die in your sins.” And here He said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know *that I am (He)*.” The cross of Jesus and His subsequent resurrection and enthronement in heaven over the kingdom of God manifest and substantiate that Jesus is the Son of God. Even when our Lord died on His cross and the manner in which it took place, it seemed that everyone present knew that this man whom they crucified was who He claimed to be. That is not to say that they all believed on Him in the sense that they trusted Him, but they knew that He was no ordinary man they hung upon the cross. Even the Roman centurion who was instrumental in having Jesus nailed to His cross declared upon His death that He was the Son of God. Here is Matthew’s account:

⁵⁰And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

⁵¹Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, ⁵²and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

⁵⁴*So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”* (Matt. 27:50-54)

And so, when Jesus said to these Jews on this occasion, “*When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He*”, He was not saying that they would all be converted, having believed on Him.

By this John is not saying that all of Jesus’ opponents will be converted in the wake of the cross. But if they do come to know who Jesus is, they will know it most surely because of the cross. And even those who do not believe stand at the last day condemned by Him whom they “lifted up” on the cross, blinded to the glory that shone around them, yet one day forced to kneel and confess that Jesus is Lord (cf. Phil. 2:10-11)¹²

But when they crucified Jesus, it would seem that many, many of the Jews knew that what they had done was terribly wrong. And later when the apostles bore witness of Jesus being crucified, great numbers of Jewish people in and around Jerusalem were cut to the heart due to what they had done. They then repented of their sin and believed on Jesus as Lord, thereby becoming disciples of the Lord.

Here are more words of **John Calvin** (1509-1564) on the words of Jesus to these unbelieving Jews of their coming great consternation when they learn and realize what they intended as His destruction was the very means of His exaltation.

By the term *exalt* Christ points out His own death. He mentions His death, in order to warn them that, though they destroy Him according to the flesh, they will gain nothing by it; as if He had said, “Now you treat Me with haughty scorn, while I speak to you; but ere long your wickedness will proceed farther, even so far as to put Me to death. Then will you triumph, as if you had gained your wish, but within a short time you shall feel, to your utter ruin, how widely My death differs from destruction.” He employs the word *exalt*, in order to vex them the more. Their intention was to plunge Christ into the lowest hell. He tells them that they will be completely disappointed, and that the event will be altogether contrary to what they thus expect. He may, indeed, have intended to allude to the outward form of His death, that He was *to be lifted up* on the cross; but He looked chiefly to the glorious result of it, which soon afterwards followed, contrary to the expectation of all. True, indeed, *in the cross* itself He gained a splendid triumph over Satan, before God and the angels,

¹² Ibid.

by *blotting out the hand-writing* of sin, and cancelling the condemnation of death, (Colossians 2:14;) but it was only after that the Gospel had been preached, that this triumph began to be made known to men. The same thing which happened shortly afterwards — that Christ rose out of the grave, and ascended to heaven — is what we ought daily to expect; for, notwithstanding all the contrivances of wicked men to oppress Christ in his Church, not only will He rise in spite of them, but He will turn their wicked efforts into the means of promoting the progress of His kingdom.¹³

But in all that the Lord Jesus did and would do, He gave glory to His Father. We read in **verse 28**, “Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, *and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.*” Not only would it be revealed to the Jews that Jesus is eternal God incarnate, but they will also know through the crucifixion and His vindication in His resurrection that the Father had always been with Him, directing Him and working in Him. Everything that Jesus did He had the endorsement of His father and the presence of His Father with Him.

God the Father had sent His Son on a mission. “It is He that that sent Jesus that is with Him...” God does not and will not forsake His Messenger. Jesus is not abandoned... The deeds that Jesus did were evidence that the Father was indeed with Him.¹⁴

E. Many believed in Jesus upon hearing His words before them. (8:30)

But even before the event of the cross, there were “many” who believed in Him. We read in **verse 30**, “*As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.*” The Word preached by Jesus was effectual in bringing about their faith in Him. They believed His words, thereby they believed *in Him*. **Matthew Henry** wrote of these and others like them we may see won through the ministry of the Word:

Here is the good effect which this discourse of Christ’s had upon some of His hearers (v. 30): “*As He spoke these words many believed on Him.*” Note, though multitudes perish in their unbelief, yet there is a remnant according to the election of grace, who *believe to the saving of the soul*. If Israel, the whole body of the people, *be not gathered*, yet there are those of them in whom Christ will be *glorious* (Isa. 49:5). This the apostle insists upon, to reconcile the Jews’ rejection with the *promises made unto their fathers*. There is a remnant (Rom. 11:5). The words of Christ, and particularly His *threatening* words, are made effectual by the grace of God to bring in poor souls to believe in Him. When Christ told them that if they *believed not* they should *die in their sins*, and never get to heaven, they thought it was time to look about them (Rom. 1:16, 18). Sometimes there is a *wide door opened*, and an *effectual* one, even where there are *many adversaries*. Christ will carry on His work, though *the heathen rage*. The gospel sometimes gains great victories where it meets with great opposition. Let this encourage God’s ministers to preach the gospel, though it be with *much contention*, for they shall not *labour in vain*. Many may be *secretly* brought home to God by those endeavours which are openly contradicted and caviled at by men of corrupt minds.¹⁵

Now when we consider how obstinate and insensitive these Jews were to the hearing of instruction of Jesus, we should take warning of our own propensity to fail, and perhaps even resist to hear and understand the Word of God proclaimed and taught to us. How can we be assured that we not find ourselves among these damned souls in the Day of Judgment? And so, let us consider...

¹³ Calvin, Vol. XVII, pp. 337f.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 452.

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 992.

II. How to hear the Word of God to our spiritual benefit.

Although the Lord Jesus Himself taught the people of Jerusalem the Word of God, even the will of His Father in heaven, many failed to receive any benefit from doing so. What a privileged people they were, and yet the Word did not profit them. May that not be said of any of us. Our Lord once said to His disciples:

“Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.” (Luke 8:18).

The Apostle Peter also exhorted his readers, probably new or young Christians how important it was to desire to know the Word of God. As a baby craves the milk of his mother, so the Christian is to desire the Word of God. Peter wrote, “

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word**, that you may grow thereby, ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Pet. 2:1-3)

How we should crave God’s Word! The analogy of the nursing baby is mainly to show how we should long to hear from God. This matter of “hearing” God’s Word is very important. It is one of the sacred duties of the Christian, so we should know how to hear rightly. **John Gill**, a Baptist pastor of the 18th century, wrote of the Christian’s duty to hear rightly. He wrote:

There is an external hearing of the word, which is both a duty and a privilege, since it is the word of God that is heard, and oftentimes much profit arises from it; and it is therefore...

(1) The Word of God should be heard **constantly**, and with great assiduity (constant or close attention). If the word is to be preached in season and out of season, it is to be heard as often; or otherwise preaching is to no purpose: much may be lost by a non-attendance on and a neglect of public worship, as the case of Thomas shows.

(2) The word of God should be heard **early** and **eagerly**. It is said of Christ’s hearers, “that all the people came early in the morning to Him in the temple, for to hear Him” these were such who were swift to hear, and their earliness to hear showed eagerness to it...

(3) The word of God should be heard **attentively**. It is observed of Christ’s auditory (teaching), “that all the people were very attentive to hear Him”, or “hung on Him”, as they were “hearing”; they pressed to Him, got close about Him, and hung as it were upon His lips, to catch every word that dropped from Him.

(4) The word of God should be heard with **reverence**. All irreverent looks and gestures should be avoided in hearing it; men should consider in whose presence they are, and whose word they are hearing; not the word of man, but the Word of God. “Where the word of a king is, there is power”, and it commands awe and reverence; and much more the word of the King of kings: God is to be feared, and had in reverence, “in the assembly of the saints”; in every part of religious worship there performed, and particularly in hearing His word; we read of some that “tremble” at His word, which I understand not of a slavish fear, and legal terror at it, but of a reverential affection for it, and behavior under it.

(5) The word of God is to be heard **with faith**, since without it, hearing is unprofitable (Heb. 4:2).

(6) The word of God once heard, should be *carefully retained*, and not let slip (Heb. 2:1). We are not to be like leaking cups, which let out the liquid put into them, or like strainers which immediately let through what is poured into them; such are the forgetful hearers of the word, which ought to be laid up in the mind and memory, as a jewel in a cabinet; and which, when heard, should be kept in an honest and good heart, not only for present use, but for future good (Psa. 119:11).

However, in urging hearing the Word of God taught (or reading a man's words about the things of God) we are not advocating an uncritical hearing. Whenever we hear, we should do so carefully and thoughtfully and critically (in a good sense, that is, with discrimination). Gill also said a word about this:

I proceed to consider, the various hearers of the word; for all men do not hear alike, and to like profit and advantage. Some writers distribute hearers into four sorts, whom they compare to the following things...

(1) Some are like "*sponges*", which attract and suck in all, both good and bad; such are those hearers who receive and like all they hear; be it a sound, evangelical discourse, they will express their approbation (approval) of it; and be it the very reverse, they will commend it as a good discourse, not being able to distinguish between truth and error, sound and unsound doctrine. The best in those hearers is, they are not difficult, but are easily pleased.

(2) Others are compared to "*hourglasses*", in which the sand runs quick out of one glass into another; so some hearers, what they hear with one ear, they let out at the other, as is usually said.

(3) A third sort are compared to "*strainers*", cloth strainers, which let all the good liquor pass through, and retain the dregs and lees; so these let pass, and take no notice of what is valuable, which they hear; but if there is anything in a discourse that is weak and impertinent, foolish and vain, that they are sure to observe.

(4) A fourth sort are compared to "*sieves*", which let pass everything that is good for nothing, and only retain the fine flour; these are the best of hearers, and who are fed with the finest of the wheat.

May the Lord enable each of us to profit from the Word of God taught and preached. May He enable us to have ears to hear, minds to understand, hearts to believe, and wills to obey. May we not be as these unbelieving "Jews" who died in their sins although they were most privileged to hear the Word of God from the Lord Jesus Himself.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.
²⁸And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.
²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all;
and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

On Pleasing God

Farewell Sermon Preached August 17, 1662

Thomas Jacomb
(1622-1687)

John 8:29, “And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone: for I do always those things that please him.”

I was upon these words in the morning. Having spoken something to them as they refer to Christ, who spake them here of Himself; I then brought them down to His members, believers, and so propounded this observation from them—That whoever they are that desire to please God and do the things that are pleasing to Him, God will be with such, and the Father will not leave such alone, especially in a time of suffering and trouble.” In the prosecuting of this point, I spake to four things, which I shall not now repeat, but come to the mark which I intend at present; and that is, to make some application. Let me endeavour to prevail with every one of you, so to carry yourselves in your several places and capacities, that whatever you do, you may please God.

It was a blessed testimony that was given of Enoch, Heb. 11:6. Before his translation he had this testimony; that he pleased God.” Oh! How happy will they be at the great Day of Judgment, which shall be singled out by Christ, before angels and men; and Christ shall say of them, This was the man, or this was the woman that pleased God! There is a great deal of pleasing in the world, but there are but very few that make this their business, to please God; therefore I would have you shun that which is sinful, and press after that which is matter of duty.

1. There are some that mind nothing but to please themselves, to promote their own interest, to love their own ease, to indulge themselves in their own carnal delights, but they never mind the good of others, or the pleasing of God; the apostle speaks of, and against these, Rom. 15:1, 2, 3.

2. There are others that look no farther than the pleasing of men; if they can but keep fair with men, and shun the displeasure of men, that is all they aim at. But, my brethren, what a poor thing it is to have man to be your friend, and God to be your enemy! To have the smiles of a poor dying perishing worm, and to lie under the frowns of the great God!

Indeed there is a good pleasing of men, to please them for their edification, as the apostle speaks, Rom. 15:2 and so the apostle speaks of himself, 1 Cor. 10:32.” Even as I please all men in all things,” that is, in all things that are of an indifferent nature, not simply evil, nor simply good, in all things.

This apostle was of a yielding and complying spirit, that he might thereby the better insinuate himself into the affections of men, and be more instrumental to the glory of God, in the work of the gospel, 1 Cor. 9:22. “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some; and this I do for the gospel’s sake.”

But now in matter of duty, such things as are expressly determined by God, and so are either good or evil; in these things the apostle would be no pleaser of men. “If I should please men, I should not be the servant of Christ.” Gal. 1. It is good to please others to their edification, but we must not please others to their own ruin and condemnation. It is good to please men when we can so do, and not grieve God. Instead of pleasing men, let it be your constant care and beet endeavour in all things to please God. My brethren, this is a duty of so great importance, that was I now to take my leave of you, and should certainly know that I should never speak to you more, as we are come very near to it, for though I speak to you as a living man, yet I speak to you as a dying minister; this, I say, is a duty of that weight and importance, that I know not what to press upon you more material than this. Consult but two places of Scripture, Col. 1. “For this cause we do not cease to pray for you.” What was the thing the Apostle in this his constant prayers, did beg of God for them? It was this, that they might please God. And when he was taking his leave in the winding up of his epistle to the Hebrews, “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting

covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.” I need not go beyond the text for motives to stir you up to these endeavours: For...

Motive, 1. First consider what that God is, which I would have you endeavour to please. He is that God which made heaven and earth, that God before whom all the world is as nothing, but as a little dust in the balance, and as a drop of water to the bucket; that God whom angels adore and worship; that God who by a word from His mouth, is able to bring the whole universe into nothing. Will you not study to please this God? But further, consider what this God is to you. He is the fountain of your being, He is the God of all your mercies, He is your Creator and Sovereign, He is your Maker and Law-giver. It is He that by a smile can make you happy, and by a frown can make you miserable. It is He that hath heaven and hell at His disposal, “who openeth and none can shut, who shuts and none can open.” He that must judge every one of you, either to eternal blessedness, or else to eternal torments; it is He in whose hands your breath, your life, your soul, your all is. Will you not endeavour to please this God? As the prophet argueth in point of fear, Isa. 51:12. “Who art thou, that art afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” Oh poor creature! Who art thou that goest about to please a mortal dying man, and dost not go about to please the great God, thy Creator and Sovereign!

2. Consider that relation wherein you profess yourselves to stand to God: He is your Master, you His servants; He is your Father, you His children; He is your Lord, you His subjects. You know all that are in close relations will study to please them that are above them; as the servant his master, the child his father the subject his prince. All persons that are in a state of inferiority, will study to please their superiors, especially when they do depend upon them. Oh! How infinitely is God above those relations. Alas, there is but a very little distance betwixt you and your servants, and yet you expect they should please you, will you not, therefore, please God? Especially considering your dependence upon Him.

3. You shall not lose by pleasing God: that is enough to put us upon this. He that pleaseth God profiteth himself: in that very act wherein we please God, we profit ourselves. Men can do but little for us, yet for what they can do, we study to please them. Let me open this in a few particulars.

1. If you will sincerely endeavour in all things to please God, God will give you a gracious return to all your prayers. Oh what a mercy is this for a man to have his prayers answered by God! 1 John 3:22. Whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” Never expect that God should hear any prayers, if we do not endeavour to do those things that please Him.

2. Do you please God, then He will please you: mercy pleaseth us, and duty pleaseth God. Now when we please God in a way of duty, He will please us in a way of mercy. If we order our ways so as to please God, He will order His ways so as to please us.

3. Great is the benefit of pleasing God, even as to men: and this Solomon sets before you, Prov. 16:7, of when a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him and he hath such another expression, Prov. xxii. 11. “He that loveth pureness of heart, the king shall be his friend the meaning of this scripture is this, when we keep close to God, and walk in compliance with His will, and make it our great design to please Him, He will give us to find favour in the eyes of men. He that maketh God his friend, God will make that man’s enemies to be his friends. Men are possibly full of anger, revenge, and exasperation; be it so. Do you desire to please God? God can turn their hearts towards you; God can sweeten them in their spirits, and take away that venom that is in them; so you know He did in the case of Esau to his brother Jacob.

4. This is the way to heaven and happiness. God will be pleased before the sinner shall be saved, Heb. 11. Enoch before his translation had this testimony, “That he pleased God.” There is no way to heaven but this, the child pleases the father, and then the father gives him the inheritance. So it is here.

5. Let me return to the argument in the text; God will never leave them alone, that desire sincerely to please Him. Methinks this should be a very prevailing motive to you, especially now; please God, and He will never leave you, nor not in a time of distress and trouble. Here is the great difference betwixt a faithful God, and a false man.

In time of trouble and adversity men leave us and forsake us; in time of prosperity then they flatter us, and pretend a great deal of friendship and kindness: but as no man looks upon a dial when the sun is under a cloud; so these very men that pretend so much of kindness and friendship, if so be we do but come under a frown, or into

trouble, then their friendship and kindness is at an end, as Paul said; no man stood by him when he came to be tried before Nero, all men forsook him, but God did not forsake him. The wise man hath an expression, Prov. 17:17. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity but where shall we find such a friend, or indeed such a brother? But now if you will please God, He will stand by you, when all men leave you, when you have the greatest need of God, He will then stand by you; if you be in a prison, He will be with you; if you be banished, He will be with you: if sin doth not part God and you, certainly no affliction shall part God and you.

Study to please God. Oh! Is it not a sad thing for God to leave you! That is the saddest of all; when we lose God, then we lose all, Hos. 9:12. "Woe unto them when I depart from them." What are all the mercies if God leave you? No more than if a man had a fair pleasant house, and should never see the sun more.

Oh do the things that always please the Lord, and He will never leave you. Under mercies, under afflictions He will be with you, and then your mercies shall be very sweet, and your afflictions shall not be very bitter. You know how earnest Moses was, Num. x. 13, with his father in law Hobab the Midianite; "Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us as eyes." Oh keep God to you! Especially when you are entering into the wilderness of trouble. God will be to you instead of eyes, He will be your counsellor, your comforter, your guide, your treasure, your portion, your all.

I might add one thing more in the last place...

Study to please God, because He is so easy to be pleased. This is a motive to us to endeavour to please those persons who are easy to be pleased. A child that hath a father that is easy to be pleased: a servant that hath a master that is easy to be pleased, will study to please them. Sincerity pleaseth God, though in the midst of much infirmity. He is so gracious and merciful, that whatsoever a poor sinner doth but desire to please God, He will accept of those desires. If we can but please God, it is no great matter whether we please men or not.

I shall conclude this branch with 1 Thes. 4:1. "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us, how you ought to walk and please God, so you would abound more and more." Use: By way of direction, I should here shew you how you are to please God. I told you in general in the morning, this pleasing of God lieth in two things,

1. In suitableness to His name. 2. In subjection to His law.

If you will please God in all your actions, look to this, that what you do may bear some resemblance to His nature, and hold forth obedience to His law

Consult the will of God, and in all things act in conformity to that will. Do not allow yourselves in the commission of any known sin, for that will certainly displease God, as it was said of David when he took Bathsheba to be his wife, but saith the text, "the thing displeased the Lord." Do not balk any known duty, for that will displease God.

In a word, be holy in all manner of conversation. This being too general, I shall not insist upon it; only in a word more particularly.

Do those things now, make conscience of those duties which now lie upon you, in the doing of which you will certainly please God: and they are such as these.

Be steadfast in the ways of God, in the midst of a backsliding and apostatizing age, stand fast to the law of God, Phil. 4:1. Contend for the faith which is delivered to the saint, verse 3, of the epistle of Jude. Be not ashamed to own Christ before all the world as if you be ashamed of Him on earth, He will be ashamed of you in heaven; and woe be to that turner whom Christ is ashamed to own.

Reckon reproaches for the name of Christ, better than the pleasure of sin that is but for a season.

When God calleth you to it, assert the purity and spirituality of gospel worship. Do not place religion in a few shadows where the substance is neglected; but chiefly mind self-denial, mortification, crucifixion to the world, keeping up close communion with God, love the people of God whatever the world say or think of thee; for God is highly pleased when He seeth his children loved.

Keep up religion in your families, whatever scorn or contempt is cast upon you. Oh that you would labour to be of Abraham's spirit; "I know," saith God, "he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord," Gen. 18:19.

I do not know any one better means for the keeping of religion in this nation, than for masters of families to be conscientious in the discharging of this duty.

Be good in bad times; be patterns of good works to those that shall behold you. Let no reproach or obloquy make you to abate your exact walking with God; whatever you meet withal in the ways of holiness and a strict life, say, if this be to be vile, I will be more vile. Make conscience of a strict observation of the Lord's Day; take heed of that sacrilege of stealing away holy time; of prostituting that to common and evil uses, which is impropriated and dedicated to the service of God.

Pray for, and love all those that have been instrumental for your spiritual good in the work of the ministry, whatever dirt is now thrown in their faces, and though you never get more good by them.

Forget not to distribute to the necessities of God's people, that are many of them in a low condition; for this is a sacrifice of a sweet odor, and well-pleasing to him.

Carry yourselves with all patience and Christian meekness towards them that wrong you: pray for them that are your enemies, and when you are reviled, revile not again, but commit yourselves to that God who judges righteously.

Do your duty to your superiors, and to those that are in authority. So carry yourselves that it may be with you as it was with Daniel; they had nothing against him, saving in the matter of his God.

Balk not any duty for suffering; choose the greatest of suffering, before the least of sin.

In a word, so walk as it becometh the gospel. And finally I speak to you as the apostle spoke to them, Phil, 2:16. "Hold forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain."

The third use is for comfort, to all those that do conscientiously endeavour in all things to please God: the comfort lies in this, you may suffer, but whenever you suffer, the Father will not leave you alone. Pleasing of God does not secure a man from suffering from men, sometimes it rather exposes a man to suffer from men: but now though it does not prevent suffering, yet it takes away the sting and venom of suffering; it makes it to be Samson's lion, when it was slain, he found nothing but honey in the belly of it. Oh! The presence of God in a time of affliction is exceeding precious, it turns gall into honey, thorns into roses. Be not troubled in your thoughts about what you; may undergo: if God be with you, all will be well: if God comes when the cross cometh, the weight of it will not hurt you. What is a prison when God is there? My brethren, though estate leave you, relations leave you, all your comforts leave you, so long as God doth not leave you it will be well; -therefore do not fear, be not dejected, or discouraged. Isa. xlv. 1-2, Fear not, O Jacob," why so? "When thou "passest through the waters, I will be thee." We have more reason to be afraid of prosperity With God's absence, than of adversity with God's presence. A good God will make every condition to be good; it is not a prison but a palace where God is. They that do the things that please God, whatever condition they may be brought to, the Father will not leave them alone. Ministers may leave you the means of grace and ordinance in a great measure may leave you, your creature-enjoyments and comforts may leave you; but here is a God that will never leave you: Oh! Bless His holy name.

Fourthly, is this pleasing of God, a duty of so great importance and benefit? Then be tender and charitable doing of those that do differ from you and others, this account because they dare not displease God.

I may in this caution aim at myself and others of my brethren in the work of our ministry; but am not here at present to take my last farewell. I hope I may have a little further opportunity of speaking to you: but if not, let me require this of you, to pass a charitable interpretation upon your laying down the exercise of our ministry. There is a greater Judge than you, must judge us all at the great day; and to this Judge we can appeal before angels and men, that it is not this things or that thing that puts us upon this dissent, but it is conscience toward God, and fear of offending Him. I censure none that differ from me, as though they displease God: but yet, as to myself, though I did

thus and thus, I should certainly violate the peace of my own conscience, and offend God, which I must not do, no, not to secure my ministry, though that either is, or ought to be, dearer to me than my very life: and how dear it is, God only knoweth. Do not add affliction to affliction, be not uncharitable in judging of us, as if through pride, faction, obstinacy, or devotedness to a party, or which is worse than all, in opposition to authority, we do dissent. The Judge of all hearts knows it is not so: but it is merely from those apprehensions which after prayer, and the use of all means do yet continue that doing thus and thus we should displease God: therefore deal charitably with us, in this day of our affliction. If we be mistaken, I pray God to convince us: if others be mistaken, whether in a public or private capacity, I pray God in mercy convince them. But however things go, God will make good this truth to us; in this work he will not leave us and our Father will not leave us alone; for it is the unfeigned desire of our soul in all things to please God.
