

John 5:16-29

Honoring God

That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father – v. 23

In our last study we considered the miracle of the Lord healing the paralytic man. You will recall how this man was placed near the pool of Bethesda in the hope that he could make it into the pool on time to be healed following the stirring of the water by an angel. I pointed out that even though the passage seems on the surface of it to be strange because of this angelic action, it is nevertheless true and there is ample manuscript support for the reading we have in our KJVs even if verse 4 may not appear in what have come to be recognized as the favorite manuscripts of some textual scholars.

Following this supernatural work of mercy on this man he soon finds himself confronted by the Jews who want to know why he's carrying his bed (or mat) on the Sabbath day. The manner in which they would confront this healed paralytic is very telling when it comes to the character of his inquisitors. They don't care to inquire as to how he happens to be up on his feet and walking after 38 years of being lame. They don't appear to be ready to rejoice with him over the merciful and powerful miracle he's experienced. They're only interested to know why he's breaking the Sabbath (by their standards of Sabbath-keeping).

Sadly there are many that are like that even today. Mercy means nothing, conforming to the law, or perhaps I should say conforming to distorted notions of the law means everything. The Lord Jesus made it very plain on various occasions when He was challenged over the matter of the Sabbath that mercy is to be given a very high place of priority in the Christian's life. So we read in Mt 12:7 *But if ye had known what [this] meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

And again in Mt 23:23 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier [matters] of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* Do you see how the Lord prioritizes mercy? This healed paralytic shows very plainly that the Lord placed a high premium on mercy.

And yet as you make your way through the rest of John 5 you discover that from v. 16 to the end of the chapter John focuses on the heated resistance and hatred toward Christ, this miracle of mercy notwithstanding. Verse 16 sets the tone for the rest of the chapter when you read in that verse *And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.*

And over the course of the rest of this chapter you find Christ's adversaries progressing from anger to intense rage. Listen to v. 16 again and this time I'll read vv. 17,18 with it: *And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

Now I have to admit something to you here. I had never really known or appreciated the heights and depths of Christ's statements in Jn. 5 before engaging in this study. When you think of the most well known passages in the New Testament that expound the person of Christ and especially His deity, you usually think of passages like Heb. 1 (read earlier in the service) or Phil. 2 where Paul graphically describes the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. You remember that passage – Phil. 2:5-11:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I think we need to add John 5 to the list of key passages pertaining to the deity of Christ and the thing that makes this section of John's gospel stand out even more than the one in Heb. 1 and Phil. 2 is the fact that these are Christ's own words. It seems that at regular intervals over the span of church history right up to and including our day and age you hear about some liberal critic of the Bible who tries to put forward the claim that Christ Himself never claimed to be God in John's gospel. You would really have to gloss over chp. 5 of John's gospel in order for that statement to have any credibility.

And as I read over this passage again and again I began to sympathize with other preachers who acknowledge that such a passage is really quite beyond them. The sentiment of Ps 139:6 certainly applies to this portion of John's gospel when we read: *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot [attain] unto it.* But what I wanted to discern in the passage was not just the incredible statements of Christ that describe His relationship to His Father, but I also wanted to pick up on what the proper response to this passage should be on the part of the believer.

I find myself in agreement with Martyn Lloyd-Jones who points out in his sermon on this portion of John 5 that everything seems to lead to v. 23 – *That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.* You could say that there's a close connection between this statement and an earlier statement we considered back in chp. 4 where Christ addressing the woman at the well said to her in 4:23 *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.* I think there's a very close tie to the idea of worshipping God and honoring God.

The Greek word for *honor* here means *to revere or venerate or to estimate or fix the value of someone or something.* You've undoubtedly heard *worship* defined or described as *worship*? That's pretty much the same idea behind honoring God – assigning or fixing

the right and proper value on Him. And it's certainly worth noting in this chapter just how high a value the Father places on His Son and the Son on His Father. So we read in v. 20 *For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.* So that's what I want to focus on this morning – this idea of honoring God or honoring Christ. Certainly the mark of a true believer is that he will honor Christ. And so the question I want to raise and answer this morning is simply this:

As Believers, How Do We Honor God or Honor Christ?

I should say before we even start that you cannot honor God without honoring Christ. *He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.* Do you see what such a statement does to all false and non-Trinitarian cults and religions? It nullifies them. And beyond nullifying them it condemns them. One of the tenets of Biblical Christianity that brings the greatest reproach and the strongest offense to the world is the notion that Christianity is the one and only true religion.

The world hates that notion. The world either wants to dismiss all religions outright or wants to be all inclusive about religion which means simply that if your religion works for you then it's okay for you to embrace it, but if someone else's religion works for them, then don't you dare suggest that your religion is true and theirs is false. And yet the Christian has to regard all other religions as false. That religion that doesn't honor Christ doesn't honor God at all.

So how do we honor God and honor Christ? Consider with me first of all that if you would honor God and Christ:

I. You Must Realize Who God Is

The Jews certainly picked up on Christ's claim to be God when He said to them in v. 17 *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* Keep in mind, this is Jesus answer to the accusation that He had broken the Sabbath by healing the paralytic man. There was a sense, you know, in which God continued to work even when He rested on the 7th day. It's true that He ceased from His work of creation and in His rest He set the example of what He would have His creatures do.

This is why we refer to the Sabbath as a Creation Ordinance before we see it as a Mosaic Ordinance. And when you read in the New Testament, Colossians in particular how the Mosaic ordinance has been done away, we say Amen to that but we keep in mind that the Sabbath was not just a Mosaic ordinance it was a Creation Ordinance, just like marriage is a Creation Ordinance.

The point I'm making now, however, is that even when God rested from the work of creation, He did not cease to work from the work of providence. God could never cease from His work of upholding the world that He created. If God were to take a break from upholding the world it would mark the end of the world. So there are some matters in

which God continued and still continues to this day to work. There are some works, you see, that can only be done by God and what Christ is saying to the Jews is that He, like His Father, continues to work the works that can only be done by God.

You remember how John's gospel begins? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* So Christ was involved in the work of Creation.

And in the chapter we read earlier from Heb. 1 we read: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power...* So here we see Christ actively engaged in the work of His Father in the matter of Divine providence – upholding all things by the word of His power.

These are the works that Christ was referencing when He said that His Father works and so does He. And in addition to the works of Creation and Providence you could add to that the ongoing works of mercy which explains how the healing of the paralytic was in keeping with the ongoing work of God.

Now v. 18 shows us that the Jews understood His meaning completely. So when Christ says that His Father works and so Christ works also, we read *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

And rather than try to dislodge a wrong notion from their minds by disavowing any claim to being God, Christ instead builds on His initial statement even though it was making His adversaries angrier by the minute.

So we go on to read in v. 19 *Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.* These words may seem strange to us on the surface of them.

I like the explanation that Albert Barnes gives in his commentary of the New Testament:

Jesus, having stated the extent of his authority, proceeds here to show its source and nature, and to prove to them that what he had said was true. The first explanation which he gives is in these words: The Son — whom he had just impliedly affirmed to be equal with God — did nothing of himself; that is, nothing without the appointment of the Father; nothing contrary to the Father, as he immediately explains it. When it is said that he CAN do nothing OF HIMSELF, it is meant that such is the union subsisting between the Father and the Son that he can do nothing independently or separate from the Father. Such is the nature of this union that he can do nothing which has not the concurrence of the Father, and which he does not

command. In all things he must, from the necessity of his nature, act in accordance with the nature and will of God. Such is the intimacy of the union, that the fact that he does anything is proof that it is by the concurring agency of God. There is no separate action — no separate existence; but, alike in being and in action, there is the most perfect oneness between him and the Father.

We will see Christ affirm this truth repeatedly in the gospel of John. So we read in Jn. 10:30 *I and [my] Father are one.* And again in Jn. 17:21 *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* It's not my intention at this time to elaborate on where we as Christians are brought into this union. We are brought into it, but not in an essential sense. The point I'm stressing now is that Christ was so joined to His Father that they were and are perfectly united in the will of God and perfectly united in the work of God.

And not only does this union pertain to the works of Creation and Providence but it also pertains to the work of salvation. I said a moment ago, that the Father and the Son's ongoing work also encompasses works of mercy. And what do you suppose is that ongoing work of mercy? It's just this – the imparting of life. Look at the words of v. 21 *For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*

I like the explanation Lloyd-Jones gives of Christ's words here. Lloyd-Jones believes that Christ is making reference first to physical life. The widow of Nain in Luke's gospel would see her dead son raised to life when Christ crossed the path of that funeral procession. And of course, Lazarus would be called forth from the grave by Christ following a 4 day period in his tomb. But then Lloyd-Jones goes on to state that not only does Christ give physical life but He gives spiritual life to whom He will. The word *quicken* means to give life.

The Psalmist, in the 119th Psalm uses the word *quicken* no less than 9 times and the idea behind the word is to be made alive again. The ESV translates the petition: *Give me life.* So we read in Ps. 119:25 *My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!* And v. 107 *I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word!; Give me life according to your promise!* – v. 154; *Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your rules* – v. 156.

Do you begin to see how closely joined the Son is to the Father and the Father to the Son? They are both engaged in Creation; they are both engaged in the providential rule of the universe; they are both engaged in the work of calling forth life, physical life and spiritual life. There is one more matter in which the Father and Son are mutually engaged and that's in the work of judgment yet to come.

Look at the words of our text beginning in v. 26: *For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; 27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come*

forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. 30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

They are One in purpose, One in creation, One in providence, One in regeneration, and now One in judgment. Do you see how Christ, far from dislodging the notions in the minds of His adversaries that He made Himself equal with God actually goes to great lengths to build on that notion. I'll mention one more thing before leaving this point. If you're fond of reading theological articles or theological blog posts on in internet chances are you've heard the phrases: ontological Trinity and economic Trinity.

By ontological Trinity is meant the Trinity in its essence – this idea is revealed to us in a verse we just read – v. 26 *For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.* A communicated essence, if you will that makes the Son and the Spirit of the same essence – or as our shorter catechism puts it in answer to How many persons there are in the Godhead – *There are three persons in the Godhead; the father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.*

So that's the ontological Trinity. The economic Trinity makes reference to the functions that each person in the Trinity is said to perform. And even though their actions are as one there is an emphasis on God the Father being One who planned salvation; God the Son is the One who executed the plan of salvation; and God the Spirit is the One who applies the plan of salvation to the sinner.

So now – how do we honor God? This is not a matter of insignificance or theological hairsplitting. It's very important that you know who you're honoring. You worship and serve and honor the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But we must move on now to consider one very important matter before we bring this study to a close. I'm endeavoring to answer the question as to how we honor God. I've been describing that we honor Him by knowing Him, and by knowing Him, I don't mean simply knowing about Him. That's important but it's not enough. We need something in our lives that will enable us to honor God. And that brings me to my next and final point.

If you would honor God:

II. You Must Experience the Grace of God

Keep in mind the setting of this discourse by Christ. He's just healed a man and enabled that man to take up his bed and walk. That man was in that awful condition for 38 years. He had always hoped he could somehow enter into the pool of Bethesda but it never happened. Then Christ singles him out and asks him if he would be made whole and Christ makes him whole.

What a tremendous display of grace and kindness and mercy. But the Jews were not impressed. The irony here is that the Jews considered themselves to be the guardians of

God's honor but in fact they were not honoring God at all. The Sabbath must be kept at all costs, they would have reasoned. The important thing in their view was not that a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years had been raised up – that pealed into insignificance in comparison to the fact that this miracle took place on the Sabbath day.

It becomes quite apparent, doesn't it, that from their perspective man was made for the Sabbath rather than the Sabbath being made for man. God had these rules and in order to foist these rules on someone he needed man so he created man. That's the mindset of legalism. It totally distorts the mercy and grace of God.

And such was their zeal that they wanted to kill Jesus. And the more He revealed Himself to them the more their zeal to kill Him increased. They were lost. Oh they were religious but they were lost. And they had great zeal but they were lost. They teach us an important lesson that we do well to keep in mind especially as we continue to live in such an ungodly culture. The lesson they teach us is that there's always a moral reason behind most every sin. They wanted to kill Christ – that was certainly a sinful desire and one they did their utmost to execute and eventually would succeed.

But in their own minds there was a moral rationale. Christ was from their perspective a Sabbath breaker and a blasphemer. And I have no doubt that they sincerely believed that. The point I want you to consider now, however, is that what I'm describing when I describe these zealous Jews is you and me and all sinners apart from the grace of God.

Ro 8:7 Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.

We marvel, don't we, that these Jews could be so hostile toward Christ even in the setting of a wonderful and gracious miracle of mercy and kindness in raising up a man who had been lame for 38 years. We do marvel at that as well we should but lest we get too carried away in our condemnation of the Jews, keep in mind that they picture you and they picture me and they picture every unregenerate soul.

So how can you tell which category you fall into? Are you in that category of people that actually think they honor God when in fact they dishonor Him? Or are you in the category of those that truly honor Him? Verse 24 provides the test by which you can tell. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

Have you heard His word? Has His word captured your heart and does it rule your heart? Are you able to affirm what His word says about Him – that He's the Christ, the Son of God and that He's equal with His Father. If you can humbly and honestly make such an affirmation then Christ's word to Peter also applies to you when He said to Peter in Mt. 16:17 *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

You're the recipient of a miracle no less spectacular than the miracle Christ performed on the paralytic man. You've been called from death unto life. You've gained everlasting life and will not come into condemnation. Can you see it? You would never have affirmed the truth of Christ apart from a supernatural work of grace and mercy on your soul. You would have gone on in your enmity and would ultimately a hater of Christ, like the Jews in our text.

But if you can humbly and honestly say that you do believe in Him and in His word and you do have the desire to serve and worship Him then you come into that category of people that do indeed honor Him. And my exhortation to you is that you keep on honoring Him. Honor Him by doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). And the light of His countenance will shine upon you and you'll be enabled in the power of His might to go from faith to faith and from strength to strength. May the Lord show each one here where he stands in the matter of honoring Christ and what we must do.