

Honoring the Son (John 5:15-23)
Part 3, Equality with God
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/8/2021)

Introduction

1. Jesus healed the paralytic in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to provoke the Jewish rulers (John 5:1–9).
 - a. In verse 16, John informs us that, because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the Jews began to persecute Him and would continue to do so. The verb (*were persecuting*) is in the *imperfect* tense, indicating a continuing stream of action.
 - b. Jesus' response to them (v. 17) was designed to further inflame them because He declared equality with God the Father (v. 18).
2. Equality with God was, in the Jews' view, blasphemy because there is only *one* God (Isaiah 40:18, 25). The Jews, as well as many others, could not conceive of one God in three persons.
 - a. The Jews believed Jesus was challenging the fundamental distinction between God and man by making Himself equal with God. This is clear from John 10:33.
 - b. The Jewish leaders from the Sanhedrin had the responsibility of investigating new preachers and teachers who appeared in the land in order to guard against false prophets leading the people astray. While it is true that the Jews had turned the Sabbath observance into a nightmare of regulations and restrictions, it was actually the spiritual blindness of these people that the Lord confronted.
3. In the text before us Jesus uses four powerful arguments to demonstrate His authority to heal on the Sabbath because of His equality with the Father.

I. The Unity of Father and Son (v. 19)

1. Jesus explained why "*the Father is working until now and the Son also works*" and "*for whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.*" The Father initiates, sends, commands, grants. The Son responds, obeys, and performs the Father's will; thus, He receives authority from the Father.
2. Two errors must be avoided. First, Jesus' submission to the authority of the Father could be wrongly construed as an *inferiority* to the Father. The distinction is not one of *essence* but one of *position*. Submission did not negate Jesus' equality with the Father. Second, the Jews might have misunderstood His Sabbath violation as acting independently of God. Self-determination would set Jesus over against the Father as another god. Jesus meet this misunderstanding in verse 19. Jesus' explanation was actually another claim to deity—Jesus' perfect Sonship.

II. The Love of Father and Son (v. 20)

1. This clause explains *how* the Son can do all that the Father does. First, the Father established His relationship to the Son: "*The Father loves the Son.*" As a wise and loving Father, He has the best interest of the Son at heart. How is this demonstrated? The Father "*shows [the Son] all that He Himself is doing.*" In this way the Son is privy to the Father's will and purpose. The Son responds in perfect obedience. He said this in John 14:31.
2. So, when people saw Jesus doing something like healing the paralytic, two things followed: (1) The Jews should have understood that Jesus was revealing the Father to them (1:18). The healing was just a preview of the greater works—*resurrection* and *judgment*—yet to be revealed "*to your*

amazement.” (2) Those who persisted in their opposition to Jesus would be judged at the resurrection.

3. It was not God’s love for mankind, but His love for the Son that forms the foundation for all He does, including redeeming a people for His name.

III. The Life-Giving Father and Son (v. 21)

1. The healing of the paralytic is an example of the Father’s perfect self-disclosure through the Son. These are parallel clauses, which argues that both Father and Son are God. Only God has the prerogative to raise the dead (2 Kings 5:7).
2. What about Elijah? He raised the dead in the O.T. Yes, but only as a representative of God. Jesus took it one step further—“*The Son gives life to whom he will.*” The healing at Bethesda was also Jesus’ *choice*. The healing was not requested by anyone, and only he of all others was healed.

IV. The Judgment Given to the Son (v. 22)

1. This statement reveals the intention of God in sending His Son and empowering Him to work the works of the Father—“*that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.*” Here the two clauses are not parallel: the Father judges no one; it is the Son who judges. The purpose of Jesus’ doing what the Father does is seen not only in the activity but in the *honor*. This places Jesus far above any mere ambassador (Philippians 2:9–11; compare this with Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11).
2. In the matter of judgment, there is a tension between John 3:17 and 5:22, but it is one of understanding, not substance. The difference is in the range of meanings the word *judgment* has. Jesus’ first coming was primarily redemptive. He came to seek and to save. His second coming, which is predicated on the first, will be to judge and condemn. Indeed, the condemnation itself is already fixed (John 3:36). Only the Son’s giving life to whom He pleases will lift this condemnation from a believer.

Conclusion

How does this information apply to believers today?

1. As Jesus worked in John’s day, He is still, like the Father, working today. He is building His church and preparing His people for the eternal kingdom. Thus, we need to ask, “How is He working in me today?”
2. Jesus’ work included many great and amazing things recorded in Scripture. History documents many more great and amazing things since then. What great and amazing things will He do in our time? Why does it seem that we are living in a period of spiritual stagnation? Is God preparing us for great things before Jesus returns? (Revelation 11:6).
3. Has Christ given you new life? (vv. 24, 25). Have you been born from above?
4. Do you understand that all will be summoned before Jesus for *judgment* (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27; 10:30, 31; James 2:12; 3:1; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 4:17). For believers, the judgment will not be *judicial*—for the punishment of sin—but it is the judgment of *obedience* in accordance with the will God (1 Corinthians 3:13, 15). So, are you living your life according to His will and purpose for you to glorify God?