

The Authority of the Son (5:25-47)

5:25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

5:26 For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;

5:27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

5:28 Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,

5:29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

When the voice of the Son calls to the dead, those who hear it will live (I Thess. 4:16). The hour of hearing His voice is both present (as Jesus spoke) and future.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the dead heard His voice. The raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:43), the widow's son (Lk. 7:11-17), and Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:35-43) all demonstrated the power of Christ's voice and provided a preview of the resurrection to come. But Jesus' voice also gave life to the spiritually dead. Jesus said, "he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has* eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but *has passed out of death into life*" (Jn. 5:24). In this sense, His voice is present even today. Jesus' voice gives life whenever it is heard.

If people are amazed by this, greater amazement awaits the future hour when the tombs will be emptied by the voice of the Son of God and judgment will be pronounced by Him. In utter astonishment men will see the Son standing before them possessing the authority of God as the Judge (Ps. 50:6; 75:7; 82:8; 96:13; Isa. 5:16; Ja. 5:9; I Pet. 4:5 etc.).

The judgment spoken of in verses 28 and 29 is the final judgment which includes the bodily resurrection of both the righteous and the evil (Dan. 12:2 Matt 25:46; Ac 24:15; II Cor. 5:10). The judgment is based on one's works (Psa. 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 25:14; Matt. 16:27; Jo. 5:29; Ro. 2:5-9; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:12-13). The lives that people live form the test of the faith they profess. Christ will separate the believer from the unrepentant by his or her own actions and beliefs (Morris, 322, + n. 86; also see Ro. 2:6-8; Matt. 25:31-46). Thus, the judgment will not be arbitrary; it will agree with the choices people have already made. Those who have done good things have come to the light, and those who have done evil and loved the darkness rather than the light will be judged accordingly. The former have eternal life already, the latter are already judged (Jn. 3:19-21 - Bruce, 133).

Verses 26 and 27 explain why judgment and the raising of the dead have been given to the Son.

God is the living One (Ps.36:9). All life comes from Him (Gen.2:7; Ps. 16:11). Because He is the fountain of life, He possesses the power to give life and raise the dead (Carson, 256; Bernard I, 243). Verse 26

states that He has also granted the Son to have life in Himself. This means that the Son has the same capacity as the Father to give life. In John 1:4 we were informed that the prerogative of the Son "having life in Himself" was possessed from all eternity. In other words, His ability to bestow life was not something that happened at the incarnation or with the beginning of His ministry on Earth, but was an eternal act that existed in the Father-Son relationship from the beginning. The Son is the very embodiment of eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifested to us (I Jn. 1:1-2; Bruce, 132). Thus, Christ can be called the "Living One" (Rev. 1:18), and it is His possession of life that allows Him to grant life to others (Carson, 256; Bernard I, 243). The voice of the Son of God is nothing less than the voice of God (Isa. 55:3) whose power gives life-giving spirit even to dry bones (Ezek. 37) (Carson, 256).

Hodge, in his Systematic Theology explains that there is a group of passages where things are said of Christ as the God-man (Theanthropos) that are not true of the divine nature itself. He uses John 5:25 as one of his examples of this.

He says.

Thus it is said, "The Son also himself shall be subject to him who put all things under him." Here the designation Son is from the divine nature, but the subjection predicated is not of the Son as such, or of the Logos, nor is it simply of the human nature, but officially of the God-man. So our Lord says, "The Father is greater than I." The Father is not greater than the Son, for they are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. It is as God-man that He is economically [in God's system of divine government of the world] subject to the Father. Perhaps the passage in John 5:26 may belong to this class. "As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." This may be understood of the eternal communication of life from the first to the second person of the Trinity (i.e., of eternal generation); or it may refer to the constitution of Christ's person. And then the term Son would designate, not the Logos, but the Theanthropos [God/man], and the communication of life would not be from the Father to the Son, but from God to the Theanthropos [God/man]. It pleased the Father that Christ should have a divine nature possessed of inherent life in order that He might be the source of life to his people. (Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, 393-394).

Verse 27 gives the reason why judgment is given to the Son; namely, because He is the Son of man. This designation is most likely an allusion to the heavenly figure of Daniel 7:13-14 to whom is given dominion, glory and a kingdom. But it also refers to Christ's humanity. As the Son of man in Daniel, He has the right to judge; as a human being He is appropriate to judge other humans, having walked where they had walked (Carson, 257).

5:30 "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Once again Jesus stresses His dependence on the Father. The desire that "God's will be done" in every decision of life (Matt. 6:10) was perfectly realized in Christ (Bernard I, 246). The Father, Son, and the Spirit are not three persons who possess three minds; they are three persons who possess the same mind of God.

In verse 19 Jesus spoke of seeing the Father. Here in v. 30, He spoke of hearing Him. The meanings of both are metaphorical and point to His complete dependence on the Father. In other words, this is a reiteration of verses 19-20 specifically applied to Jesus' authority in judgment (Carson, 259). If people don't object to the Father judging, neither should they object to the Son, for the Son is simply doing the will of Him who sent Him.

5:31 "If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.

5:32 There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true."

The idea of witness or testimony is prominent in this gospel (cf. 1:7). Because "the life had been manifested" it became possible for men to grasp the meaning of its nature and bear witness of it (I Jn. 1:1-3). It is through testimony that the things that Jesus said are substantiated and by which they ought to be received.

In the Jewish legal system, two or three witnesses were necessary to prove the authenticity of a statement (see Matt. 18:16; 26:60, 65; II Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28). If Jesus testified of Himself, His testimony would not be admissible. Though this may be true among men, in reality, Jesus needs no other witness, for if all that He says is from the Father, then the Father's stamp of approval is already upon Him (Carson, 260). God's testimony is all that is needed for everything He says is true.

Nevertheless, Jesus speaks of five different witnesses: 1) the Father (verses 32, 37), 2) John the Baptist (verse 33), 3) His works (verse 36), 4) Scripture (verse 39), and 5) Moses (verse 46).

5:33 "You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth.

5:34 But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

5:35 He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light."

John the Baptist also testified of Christ. Verse 33 is a reference to the committee sent by the Jews to inquire of him (Jn. 1:19-28; RWP; Brown I, 224). They respected John for a while (Jn. 5:35), though they

had grown tired of him as his ministry continued. Although Jesus doesn't need the testimony of men, He makes every appeal possible to convince His listeners to be saved (Jn. 5:34; Westcott, 198).

John is the lamp (Jn. 1:4-8; 34); Jesus is the true Light (Jn. 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Though John did His ministry well, once the Light has come, the lamp is no longer needed.

5:36 "But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish-- the very works that I do-- testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me."

However valuable the testimony of John was, the testimony of Jesus' works was far weightier. These works include the signs He performed and His work of redemption at the cross. Nicodemus was aware of the importance of His works to a degree. In John 3:2 he said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." But a proper understanding of Jesus' works reveals that the Father has sent Him and shows that He was more than just a prophet (Matt. 11:4-6; Lk. 7:22-23).

Once the Father/Son relationship is grasped, all that He does testifies of who He is (Carson, 261-262; Alford, 750).

5:37 "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

5:38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent."

In addition to the testimony of the Father's works being wrought in Christ, the Father gave direct testimony concerning Him as well. The problem was with the Jews' inability to hear God's voice; they failed to see the Father's testimony for His word was not abiding in them ("To abide" denotes permanent possession and steadfast influence - I Jn. 2:14 and the same idea in 17:6; contrast I Jn. 1:10). God's word does no good unless it inwardly possesses those to whom it comes (Dods, 744).

5:39 "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;

5:40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

The tragic failure of the Jews to grasp the truth was nowhere more clearly seen than in their approach to the Scriptures. Though the Scriptures testified of Christ, the Jews completely missed what was said about Him. They sought life in the Scriptures, but didn't follow where the Scriptures led them. Had they done so, they would have found Jesus, and in Him the life they were searching for.

5:41 "I do not receive glory from men;

5:42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves."

Anticipating the charge that He is acting out of self-interest, Jesus asserts that He is not seeking human acclaim (Kostenberger, 193). He has already said that He doesn't accept human testimony (Jn. 5:34); now He adds that He doesn't seek glory from men either. Though the works that Jesus did testified to who He was and manifested His glory, He desired that His works point men to the Father, not Himself. Because He loved God, He wanted God to receive the glory. The Jews, on the other hand, valued the attention of others and gladly received glory for themselves, proving that their love for self surpassed their love for God.

5:43 "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him."

Jesus came in the Father's name. A name was an expression of personality. Thus, coming in the Father's name doesn't just mean coming as a representative of the Father (though this is included); it conveys the idea that the incarnate Son reveals the Father in power and character (Bernard I, 255). If they didn't love God, they couldn't love the One who came in His name (Dods, 745).

Their lack of love for God not only meant that they were incapable of recognizing Him in Christ, it also meant that they were vulnerable to false Christs who professed to come in God's name.

5:44 "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"

Disbelief in the face of these witnesses was motivated by pride and the seeking of glory from others. If the Jews had an intellectual problem, it could be met with explanation, but they had a moral problem in their orientation to life. They were not just rejecting the One sent by God; they were doing so in order to receive glory from men. The failure to accept Jesus is really a preference for self.

5:45 "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.

5:46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.

5:47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

The Jews' national claim was that they were disciples of Moses (9:28) and Moses had given them the law of the Sabbath, which they now accused Jesus of breaching (Bernard I, 257). Some even thought that Moses still interceded for them (Carson, 265). Surely they thought that Moses would defend their cause. But an accuser is found in the supposed advocate (Westcott, 203). It's not necessary for Jesus to accuse them, for Moses had already done so (Alford, 753).

Jesus is severe in His assessment of His hearers' openness to receive revelation.

Moses heard God's voice (Ex. 33:11), but the Jews failed to hear God's voice in Christ. It follows, therefore, that they really had nothing in common with Moses. In fact, Moses turns out to be the accuser. Had they believed Him they would have believed Christ as well. Jacob (Israel) had seen God's form (Gen. 32:30-31), but the Jews failed to see that Christ was the very image of God, the exact representation of His nature (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 1:18; 14:8-9).

Those who had opposed Jesus didn't grasp the importance of the revelation He brought, for He was the fulfillment of all that the fathers had been waiting for (Heb. 1:2; Jn. 1:14, 18). Failure to believe in Jesus is, therefore, compelling evidence that no matter how diligently they had studied the Scriptures, the message the Scripture brought had never been fully absorbed (Carson, 262-263; Morris, 329).