

Notes on John 5

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John 2-4 reported some early positive response to Christ. The apostle reported faith in Christ among Jesus' disciples, among the Samaritan woman and the people of her town, and the royal official whose son was healed. Chapter 3 did not say Nicodemus believed, but he did not react against what the Lord said to Him. In chapter 5 it is very different; hostility to Jesus increases, and the religious leaders in Jerusalem hoped to murder Him. God had given a number of reasons to believe, but they resisted all of them. This Gospel was written to encourage faith in Christ. The apostle not only reports events that show that some believed, he included many examples of resistance. To understand the book, it is helpful to see both responses: faith and rejection. In 1:11,12 John spoke of receiving and rejection in principle; in the remainder of the book he gives specific examples.

4:35 indicates an event that appears to be late in the year. If so, this unnamed feast in 5:1 can only occur in the next year, "some time later," (5:1). It is possible that this healing and its ensuing controversy is all this Gospel reports in the second year of Jesus' ministry. John obviously was not seeking to give a detailed report of Jesus' activities. Selecting his material carefully, John was ever the evangelist seeking to convince people to believe (20:30,31). He also reported in this chapter on the reality and danger of unbelief. There is no middle ground; we will believe or reject.

All the signs John chose to write were given to promote faith in Christ. In the previous section (John 2-4), there was no visible sign in the sight of the Samaritans, yet they believed. The royal official believed before he saw or heard that his son was healed. Nicodemus was aware of Jesus' miraculous signs (3:2) but in His responses to him, Christ made no reference to them. At the wedding in Cana, the transformation of the water was known only to a few in the background but not the master of the banquet. The next four signs in this Gospel had much publicity, yet they did not convince hardhearted observers even though they knew that remarkable supernatural events had occurred. Unbelief is spiritually fatal; only by a direct intervention of God is a man able to believe.

Many know the story of the man told to "pick up his bed" (i.e., the mat he slept on). Probably fewer know of the controversy stirred up by this miracle. John gives more attention to what Jesus said afterwards than he does to the miracle itself. The miracle was an opening to a weighty revelation of the relation of the Father and the Son. Miracles may be observed, but only those who heed the words of Christ understand. It was typical of John when reporting miracles to convey their significance.

A. The Miracle at the Pool of Bethesda, 5:1-15

5:1 John supplies information for readers lacking knowledge of Jewish culture. He describes the feast as one the Jews had – something Jewish readers would not need to be told. He provides the name of the pool in his dialect and its location. As an evangelist, John wrote for an audience not familiar with Jerusalem and its customs. The Holy Spirit had him write in a way that brought understanding to outsiders.

5:1-5 Much detail appears in these verses. The miracle happened during one of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem during a feast. John mentions the location within Jerusalem, the covered walkways, and the plight of the needy gathered there. All this indicates that it was written by one well aware of the circumstances. The man who was healed is not named, but the long time he was afflicted is given.

<p>What happened to v.4? Some Bible translations include information about how the water was stirred. Such words seem to make sense of v.7. We should reject this addition to Scripture, because it is not found in the older manuscripts of the NT. In v.7 the Bible reports a superstition believed by the invalid, but does not promote it by agreeing with what he thought. The pool was spring fed, and that could explain the stirring some thought was the act of an angel. Nothing in the Bible indicates that anyone who could "race" others would receive God's mercy before those who were more weak. (See Ecclesiastes 9:11.)</p>
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For centuries NT manuscripts were copied by hand. Sometimes comments were written in the margins of the text. When making copies, later scribes seeing the marginal notes might incorporate them into the text itself. It is wise to presume that the shorter and/or more difficult text is likely to be the correct one. Reasons for this: first, scribes were more likely to *add* a note than to omit text. Secondly, when they encountered a difficult text, a few scribes yielded to the temptation to insert an explanation (or marginal notation) than to leave puzzling words the way they found them.

5:6 Jesus *learned* of the condition of the invalid. As God He knew, but as a man He learned. As God Jesus needed no support for His life, but as man He needed rest and food. The orthodox view of Christ is that He is one Person with two natures, divine and human. The human nature was really human with human limitations, thus in v.6 Jesus learned.

By choosing to heal this man – and He healed only one of all the needy persons there – He chose a man whose situation was desperate. He brought healing to one He was pleased to heal, an action that fits in His later words in 5:21. Jesus did not come on a superficial mission to remove God’s curse on sinners by merely healing their bodies, while He experienced no trouble. Our salvation impacted Him directly. He came to save us by entering into our plight, assuming as His own our curse and enduring our penalty. This He did when on the cross He experienced the full weight of our sin. He did not heal all the people He could have. In John 5, it was only one man! Jesus came to save in a total salvation all those the Father had given Him.

5:7-9 See “What happened to v.4?” above. The man’s reply shows his sense of hopelessness. He expected nothing from the kindness of God; his vain hope was in the speed he did not have to be the first one into the pool. Jesus’ word to him was a command to get up, pick up, and walk. John does not report that Jesus touched him. With three imperatives, He ordered him. This fits in with Jesus’ later defense of His action that He had the authority of God to act as He did. It also fits in with John’s teaching of the central place of the word of Christ. (See “*Word as a Title for Christ*” in my notes on the Prologue.) In a Gospel devoted to faith in Christ, there is no report of faith in this man, and later he shows no allegiance to Christ. The blind man healed in chapter 9 is the opposite.

5:9-12 Because Jesus told a man to carry a load on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders challenged this as a Sabbath violation. The man was not involved in a kind of work such as carrying a load of goods to market. (See Jeremiah 17:21,22 and Nehemiah 13:15-18.) Taking his bed mat home was not commerce. In the Synoptics, the Lord was challenged for healing on that holy day, but here the initial reaction was on the issue of work. The Jews (i.e., the Jewish religious leaders) probably perceived Jesus’ instructions to the invalid as a threat to their position as arbiters of what is permissible. They certainly wanted to know who had given the invalid such permission.

5:13-15 The Lord healed the man and then slipped away from the area. It does not appear that He had been preaching there, which He often did in the temple courts. Thus the man did not even know Jesus’ name. First, he deflected responsibility for the charge of Sabbath-breaking to the one who had told him to carry his bed mat. Then when he found out who He was, he told the Jews that it was Jesus. This reveals a great lack of gratitude.

The Lord warned the former invalid against further sin. The consequences of continued sin would be far worse than lying helpless for 38 years. This implies both things: that his former trouble was a retribution for sin in this life, and that God punishes sin. Eternal punishment for sin is always worse than anything sinners suffer in this life. 9:1-3 shows that we are unable to discern whether suffering is directly linked to personal sin. All suffering is related to the first sin of Adam & Eve; this is clear, but we are unable to read the mind of the Lord for the reason behind specific instances of suffering.

Sabbath Controversies in the Synoptics More reaction to Christ related to the Sabbath is reported in the Synoptics than we find in John. This included Jesus and His disciples picking and eating grain (Matthew 12:1-8), and healing a man with a withered hand (Matthew 8:9-14). See also Mark 2:23 – 3:6. Before sunset on the Sabbath Peter’s mother-in-law was healed (Matthew 8:14,15). We know from Mark 1:21-31 that it

was on the Sabbath. (According to Mark 1:32-34, after sunset Jesus healed many more.) To this, Mark 1:21-28 adds casting an evil spirit out of a man. So far that is two Sabbath healings in Matthew and three in Mark. Luke reports all of these and adds two more in Luke 13:10-17 and 14:1-6.

Some of these incidents are simply reported as events, but the following in the four Gospels are occasions of controversy:

- Healing the invalid of 38 years, John 5
- Healing the man born blind, John 9
- Picking and eating the grain, Matthew 12:1-8
- Healing the man with the withered hand, Mark 3:1-6
- Healing the woman crippled for 18 years, Luke 13:10-17
- Healing the man with dropsy in the house of a Pharisee, Luke 14:1-6

B. The Elaboration that Followed, 5:16-30

In the remaining verses of John 5, we have no quotation of anything Jesus' opponents said to him. We know they persecuted him (v.16) and the reason (v.18). Yet all that follows is Jesus' reply to them – not as a defense of a Sabbath healing but as an elaboration of His actions as the Son of God.

This is far different from how we can justify helping a person on the Sabbath. We can defend merciful actions from Scripture as He did in Matthew 12:3-8, and with illustrations of mercy to sheep, oxen and donkeys as the Lord used in Matthew 12:11,12, and Luke 13:15. Further, we can speak of deliverance from Satan on the Sabbath. What no other man may do, however, is defend his work the way the Lord did in John 5. These verses might be Jesus' most detailed claim of deity. His enemies immediately understood what He was saying, and so should we. The conversation soon left the Sabbath issue behind when they saw that He was claiming equality with God.

5:16-18 The Lord's critics expressed their indignation over a Sabbath Day healing. The persecution here is in the form of hostile words. Not all persecution involves physical harm, but it is always directed against a rejected person. Murder was already in their hearts and they hoped to be able to fulfill their passion to be rid of Him forever. The desire to murder Christ in John 5 falls in the second year of Jesus' public ministry; in Mark 3:6 it was in His first year.

Jesus' response to the religious leaders now moves in a direction very surprising for them. He simply claimed to be doing the kinds of things God does. He referred to God as "My Father", with the singular "My" indicating a unique relationship and partnership. It would be like someone saying, "I can do whatever God does, and I have the right to do so!" God rested from His work of creation on the seventh day, but He has not been inactive ever since. He ceased from creating, but not from governing, judging, or saving. Jesus was not only active on the Sabbath in a lawful way, He was acting as God when He healed.

The leaders were wrong to assume that carrying a bed mat home was a Sabbath violation, but they were right to interpret His words as a claim of equality with God. When some say today that Jesus is not God but only the Son of God, they do not grasp as well as Jesus' old enemies did what such a title means. In v.18 when John states their reasons for wanting to murder Christ, he was simply stating their reasoning from their perspective.

Verily, verily or truly, truly These words are used by the Lord 24 times in this Gospel. In John they are always doubled, but never so in the Synoptics. The original word comes from a Hebrew word for faithfulness. This has been transliterated in both Greek and English as the word *Amen*. It is used for strong affirmations or to indicate a positive response. The Lord used it a few times to convey things that might be a surprise (as in 13:21), but He used it often to emphasize vital truths – most of which had a connection to Himself. In early writing they lacked some of our means of emphasis. *They had no italics; they did not underline; they did not highlight*, and they had no exclamation marks!! Thus emphasis in the original text had to be accomplished by words alone. I personally wish that the very popular NIV had retained this unique manner of emphasis. To say, "I tell you the truth" is less gripping than "truly, truly", and it makes translation difficult at the one point in John where Jesus really did use words properly translated as "I tell you the truth" (16:7).

5:19-23 Jesus gave a long answer to an unstated question that was nevertheless well understood within this context. It begins with its main proposition: “*the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.*” This is followed by four clauses beginning with the same conjunction in Greek. Here are four statements that elaborate on the main affirmation. In the NIV version that follows, I have revised the conjunctions to make them uniform.

MAIN STATEMENT: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.”

- **FOR** [NIV: *because*] whatever the Father does the Son also does.
- **FOR** the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.
- **FOR** just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.
- **FOR** [NIV: *Moreover*], the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

CONCLUSION: “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father Who sent him.”

5:19 *the Son can do nothing by himself;*

The Son is not able to act on His own initiative. That would be against His nature and His relationship with the Father as His true Son. He does only what pleases the Father (8:29), and says only what the Father says (12:29). It is not that He lacks strength; it is that doing anything on His own is absolutely contrary to Who He is as the Son. He is not the expression of Himself but the image of Another – His Father. The fullness of the Father is in Him (Colossians 1:15,19). The Son is the exact representation of the Father (Hebrew 1:3). Just as there can be no son unless there is a father, Christ does not exist apart from His Father. He always thought of Himself in terms of and in relation to His Father. The Son’s essence is that He is the Father’s complete likeness. This is how we must define the Son, for it is the way He refers to Himself. To see God the Son is to see the Father, for He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 14:10,11).

5:19 *he can do only what he sees his Father doing,*

The Father shows Himself simply by showing Christ. Since this is so, this unity of Father and Son extends to all the actions of Christ. He cannot *be* apart from the Father, and He cannot *function* on His own. Thus in healing the invalid on the Sabbath Day, Jesus was doing what He saw His Father doing.

This may not be reversed, for the Father does not do whatever He sees the Son doing. The Father sent the Son; the Son does not send the Father. The Son submits to the Father and does whatever He commands, but the Father does not *submit to or obey* the Son, though He always does whatever the Son *asks* (14:16). The Father is the Head of the Son, but the Son is not the Head of the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3). So it is that *the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.* Carson says: “The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions, grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs His Father’s will, receives authority...” (p. 251). Since the Son can only do what the Father does, this means Jesus is not another God separate from or independent from the Father. They, Father and Son, with Their Spirit, are One indivisible God, not only in Name or creed, but in function. Each Person is distinct and distinguishable, but any independent action is utterly contrary to the unity of God. Jesus could only do what He saw His Father do.

The four supporting statements:

1. *For whatever the Father does the Son also does.* (v.19)

It is not the same to say that He only does what the Father does; it is a clearer expression of His Sonship for Jesus to say that everything the Father does, He does as well. God approves of kindness and so do we, but that does not mean that whatever God does we also do. We do not hold the stars in place or give the horse his

strength as in Job 38,39. What the Father has done in creation was done through the Word (1:3). If Christ can do and does do *whatever* the Father does, He must be as great as the Father, and He is! Thus the healing at the pool was an act of God, and the order to take the bed mat and walk was as much the command of God as it was the word of Jesus.

Since Christ does everything the Father does, He has implied that He is God. The Jews were correct to make that conclusion from what He said in v.17. He did make a claim of equality (v.18). Jesus had just performed an amazing miracle; a man helpless for 38 years could suddenly walk again. The Father was as active in that healing as Jesus was. So to criticize Christ for it was a criticism of God the Father. Since the Son always does whatever the Father does, He did only what was authorized by the Father that Sabbath Day. Later when Christ claimed "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,*" (Matthew 28:18), He was saying the same thing in different words: *Whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

2. *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.* (v.20)

Earlier the emphasis was that the Son does not act on His own; now the point is that the Father out of love for the Son includes Him in all He does. All the secret things that belong to the Lord, belong to Christ (Deuteronomy 29:29), because the Father loves the Son. He knows the Father fully (Matthew 11:27), because the Father has opened, shown or made available to Him all that is the Father's. Thus He has granted to the Son His life (v.26), His authority (v.27), position, privilege, prerogative, and decisions. All the rights of God have been given to the Son, so that what He has been shown belongs to Him. In this context, Jesus referred especially to the activities of God. These unique divine activities *will* be shown to the Son, bringing the focus to things yet future. When Christ performs these things in His role as the Son of Man (v.27), the mockers hearing Jesus' words that day will later be amazed.

The Father Who loves the Son is determined that Christ should have the prominent place (Colossians 1:18). The Father told Him where to sit, at His right hand (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 10:12) in heaven. The Father promotes the Son's glory (8:54). He shares His throne with His Son (Revelation 22:1) and makes Jesus' enemies the footstool of His feet (Psalm 110:1). Nothing is hidden from Christ; all that God has (Psalm 24:1) belongs to Christ Who is Heir of the Creation made through Him, by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:15,16). This includes the new creation as well (Colossians 1:18-20), thus all God has has been shown and given to Christ.

Jesus healed a man who had been a cripple for 38 years. This was just a taste of what was to come. His opponents will be utterly amazed when they see the greater things. More profound amazement awaits them as the Father, Who is the Executive Head of the Trinity, promotes Christ more completely in His role as the Son. The Jesus they scorned in John 5 will raise the dead at His glorious appearing (2 Timothy 4:1), and then all men will stand before Him in judgment (vv.21,22,28,29); they will be included in this spectacle of glory for God and terror for them. "*Every eye will see Him and even those who pierced Him...*" (Revelation 1:7). Jesus' enemies were very frustrated when He raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11. Yet He would continue from heaven healing the lame man in Acts 3. He would raise the spiritually dead (v.25) spiritually by bringing millions of Gentiles through the gospel to believe in the God of Israel, loving the true God and cherishing His word. These amazements culminate in the resurrection of all men and the Judgment Day. The Lord said more of that in vv.21,22.

3.**NIV:** *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.* (v.21) [or **ESV:** *so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*]

The Lord moves from a general affirmation (*whatever* the Father does, He also does) to two specific examples: a) giving life to the dead and b) exercising judgment. It is the proper role only of God to give or take life (2 Kings 5:7). Life from the dead can refer to a physical or spiritual resurrection, and Jesus claimed that He resurrects in both kinds (vv.25,28,29). In this way Jesus acts as God, because He is. He gives life, because He is the Son. Further, just as the Father chooses the recipients of salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6; Isaiah 44:1,2; Romans 8:33), so the Son gives life to whom He wills to give it (13:18; Matthew 11:27).

Since Christ has all the authority, rights, and activity of God, this is what He meant when He said *My Father is working and I too am working,*” (5:17). Jesus is not just a tool through Whom God works as He did with the prophets. As the Son of the Father, whatever He does is God at work. This text does not say that the Father does not give life, but the Son does. It is that the Father gives life, and so does the Son. The next sentence presents a contrast.

4. *For the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.* (v.22)

The surprise here is that it appears that the Father does not judge and the Son does. There are many places where God is the Judge. As Judge He actually judges people (Psalms 94,96). What does Christ mean by these words that the Father judges no one? When the Lord is Judge in the OT, such statements cannot exclude the Father.

The Father, Who is always the Judge, has set Christ forward to be the Judge of all in the Judgment Day. This does not lessen God’s role as Judge, because (even if we cannot comprehend this) *whatever* the Father does the Son does as well. No activity of God is excluded. (Note 5:30 8:16 & 8:30) By setting the Son forward as Judge, the Father thereby judges the world through Him in such a way that He needs to add nothing to what the Son does. When Christ acts, the Father is always acting through Him. Creation and revelation have come through the Son (1:3,17,18); now judgment entrusted to the Son, will – in the sight of all men – be by Christ the Judge. It is Christ Whom the Father has set forth as the One exhibiting the glory of God on earth in His incarnation (1:14,18), so that to see the Son was to see the Father (14:7,9). The Father positioned Christ as the Mediator allowing no other access to Himself than through the Son. In keeping with this, the Father maintains His unbending operational principle in dealing with sinners. As Redeemer, Mediator, Savior, Priest, Intercessor and Advocate, Christ is between God and men. Those who reject Him will find they still face Him in the wrath of the Lamb. No one gets away from Christ. Though it is “their wrath” in Revelation 6:16,17 (i.e., the wrath of the Father and the Son), Christ is the appointed focal point of the Second Coming.

That Day is:

- a) apokalypsis “*the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:7; also 1 Corinthians 1:7,8),
- b) parousia “*our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming,*” (1 Thessalonians 2:19)
- c) epiphaneia “*the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Timothy 6:14 see also 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

These three Greek nouns used for the Second Coming are all explicitly connected to the Son. The violent disruption of future history is never presented as the coming of the Father, because the Father has decided to make it a conspicuous Second Coming of Christ, “*the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*” (Titus 2:13).

This is not a teaching peculiar to John 5. It is Christ Who will appear visibly in divine glory. The setting of John 5 is Jerusalem and the challenge to Him came from the religious leaders. It is quite possible that some who opposed Him that day were members of the Sanhedrin who judged Him (what a reversal!) worthy of death (Matthew 26:66). When they condemned Him at His crucifixion, He said, “*In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,*” (Matthew 26:64). Their future amazement (5:20) is coming.

That the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son is taught by the Apostle Paul:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

That the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son is taught in the Revelation:

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us

from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17)

5:23 The Father loves the Son and shows all to Him. The Son does all the Father does from giving eternal life to raising the dead and condemning the wicked. By making the Mediator between God and man so prominent in divine activity, the Father has ensured that all will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. This is His intention. Anything that honors the Son glorifies the Father. Anything that belittles Christ is a rejection of the Father. If men do not understand this, God does!

Three corollaries: This statement by Christ was fully authorized by His Father, and would not be more true had the Father descended from heaven to say it Himself. By Christ saying this, the Father has spoken! (12:49,50).

- A. Thus we must conclude that any profession of belief in God, such as that alleged in both Judaism and Islam, is a false profession of belief in the one true God, because both reject the Son. Every denial of the Son is a denial of the Father Who sent Him. God cannot be honored unless His Son is honored with the identical honor due to the Father.
- B. Further, among professing Christians, I am constrained to say that the tendency to depreciate theology does us great harm. Some seem to glory in the fact that they do not confess creeds, when a good creed is a statement of belief in the true Lord God. All that the Lord has been saying about Himself and His Father in John 5 is doctrine. How can anyone depreciate doctrine without depreciating the words of Christ? Or treating what He deemed important as not so. The Bible's teaching (or doctrine) is food for our souls, just as much as its narratives. Some want only what they term "relevant," and I reply that it is God Who knows us and what is relevant to us, and He has given us the Word He has chosen to reveal. Some feel we should just stick to the basics of the gospel message. The gospel as stated in 5:24 is about the Father sending the Son. It is also about believing the words of Jesus. It would be strange indeed to think that salvation comes by hearing His words, while we ignore the words He gave in the preceding verses! Slicing truth into segments we pay attention to and truth we neglect, is very dangerous and sinful. Our loss is not a matter of reducing knowledge; it is a matter of weakening the gospel itself. John 5 connects a mind-challenging section of abstract doctrine (5:19-23) with hearing such words from Christ, and thus believing and receiving eternal life (v.24).
- C. Material on the relation of the Father and the Son is very rare in Scripture. We have been allowed Jesus' prayer to His Father for us in John 17. Very few Old Testament promises are specifically from the Father to the Son – such as Psalms 2 & 110. The moment we touch on such things we sense correctly that we have been exposed to high and holy things. That God would allow us to possess such things should be a delight to our souls and the occasion of mediation, wonder and worship. My observation, however, is that what is far better known from John 5 among evangelicals, is the miracle of the healing itself, even though the Holy Spirit has used it as an opening into a revelation of the Father and the Son.

5:24 Jesus introduced the following gospel material with "truly, truly." We must heed His words, for He declared that salvation comes by hearing. In this verse hearing/believing is a single response. There are not two groups: those who hear and those who believe. Since we are to hear Jesus' words, it would be strange to think we could ignore the theology He just gave in the previous verses about the Father and the Son. When we believe the gospel, we begin a life of receiving all His teaching.

The Conversion Controversy Some teach that we are justified by means of baptism, simply because – or so they argue – all who are in covenant are in union with Christ. Part of that reasoning is that one enters the church by baptism, and if in the church, then they are by definition part of a body of believers. In this way, as odd as it sounds, one may become a believer without actually believing. Salvation in this scenario is inclusion in the church. Baptism replaces the conversion that consists of repentance and faith. This view is not the way the Lord spoke in v.24! The one who hears/believes is an individual who converts. Both *hears* and *believes* in Greek are singular participles, so Jesus refers not to a group response but the faith of one person at a time. Hearing/believing can only occur in the consciousness of the individual being converted. While the new birth is passive, since it is what the Spirit does in us – see the notes on John 3:5 – conversion and faith are not passive. Faith is conscious and deliberate; a passive response is no response at all. Jesus taught that eternal life is received by faith. When a person hears Christ's words, he believes the Father Who sent Jesus to say what He did; then that individual in a unique conversion experience passes from death to life.

5:24 teaches that an active response is required, and that the eternal life received in this way becomes the believer's present possession. He has passed from death to life, i.e., from one condition to its opposite. The perfect tense of "*has crossed over*" indicates that it is an event with lasting results. The one who believes leaves death and enters life never to return to his former death. He will not be condemned in the future because he has already been acquitted by God with finality, never again to be in jeopardy of the wrath of God. And what did he do to gain all this? He simply heard the words of Christ and believed the Father's promise contained in them. He was justified by faith alone. Some teach a later "final justification" in the Judgment Day related to our works. The justification of the final judgment is God's public recognition of all believers previously justified.

5:25 Hearing the words of Christ results in having eternal life (v.24). This same truth is stated in v.25 in similar words. Those who hear the *voice* of the Son will live, which is the same as hearing His words. What is really different in this verse is "a time is coming" which makes us think of the Second Coming, but then He added "and has now come." In this way Jesus taught that the eternal life of the future has already arrived. This life has begun for those who hear Him. Having eternal life now is the opposite of the future second death in Revelation 20:14 – i.e., being thrown into the lake of fire. This links to v.24 which also refers to the future when Jesus promised the believer that he "will not be condemned". Just as eternal life is present in advance of the future, so also the condemnation of the final day has been averted eternally the moment the sinner believes in Christ. It was Jesus the Judge (vv.22,27) of that future day Who has made this promise to us.

5:26,27 It is obvious that vv.25 & 28 go together. Thus vv. 26,27 are an explanation of how it is that the Son of God can give life. He can do it for the simple reason that He has it! All created life is contingent. In our case we must have air, food, and sleep. We cannot live in a vacuum, nor in extremes of temperature. Our lives depend on a variety of necessary conditions. God's life depends on nothing. His life is neither derived nor supported. He not only gives life; He, unlike us, has life in Himself. The Son, just like the Father, has life in Himself, because the Father gave it to His uncreated Son.

A Theological Difficulty: The Father Granted Life to the Son This text also says that the Father granted the Son to have life in Himself. This of course puzzles us, because it makes some wonder if there was an event or a time when the Father granted the Son to receive this life. If indeed the Son is God, He is by definition eternal. Then as eternal and immutable, this life Christ has in Himself must have been eternally present. We should be cautious and observe that this text does not say that there was a time when or a moment when the Father granted the Son to have this life in Himself. The orthodox solution for this – and it is deeper than our understanding – is that Jesus speaks here of something that has always been. (Some of us call this "eternal generation") So we affirm that the Father granted the Son to have life in Himself, since the Son is a perfect reflection of the Father in all things. He is not an independent God beside God the Father. The Son has life in Himself because the Father has. The Son is eternal because the Father is. It is "like Father, like Son"! But in orthodoxy we deny that there was ever a time when the Son did not have what the Father granted Him. Even God cannot create someone to be God. The Eternal One cannot make something other than Himself to be eternal! But the Father is and can ever be the source of the life of the Son. The danger we face is that we may depart from the Biblical presentation of Christ. We are tempted to impose on the analogies Scripture employs our finite understanding when thinking of the Transcendent God. It may be that nothing is as different to our minds and experience as the Trinity itself. We have been made in His likeness, but we must discipline ourselves never to imagine that He is in ours.

The Submission vs. Equality Controversy These verses show another doctrine that creates much discomfort in modern times, yet the clarity of the Bible must not be suppressed. Not only does Jesus have life because the Father has granted it to Him, He judges because the Father has committed judgment to Him, giving the Son His authority to judge. This derived authority shows the submission of the Son to the Father, without which we could never have one God in more than one Person! He can do nothing on His own (v.30). The authority of the Father is over the Son. Thus we see in John 5 that both life and authority are granted to the Son. In our day, the assumption is that authority and submission can only occur where there is superiority and inferiority. This is a foundation of all atheistic conventional wisdom. In the Trinity there is authority and submission without inferiority. The Son is equal to the Father since He is His exact, complete, and full likeness (Colossians 1:15,19). Yet there is authority and submission within the Trinity. These roles are not reciprocal. It is not – as some would attempt to restructure the Trinity – that the Son submits to the Father, and the Father submits to the Son. Of course this relates to the role relationship of husband and wife (1 Corinthians 11:3). Man and woman are in the image of God in this respect also (Genesis 1:27). In marriage and in other human relationships, apart from the perversion introduced by our sin, equality and submission are not in conflict.

The Son with life promises life, thus our faith is in One able to keep His word to us. These two verses show us that Jesus is capable and qualified to do the things vv.24-30 address: He has life and as the Son of Man, He is Judge. Usually in Greek there is an article with *Son of Man*; here in v.27, just as in the Aramaic of Daniel 7:13,14, there is no “the.”

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13,14)

As Son of Man, Christ must be human. (The Father and the Holy Spirit could never be called Son of Man.) John 5 parallels Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is given authority. As One Who is worshipped at the instigation of the Ancient of Days (the Father), the Son of Man can be nothing less than God Himself. In ordaining the worship of Christ, the Father has not instituted a competing worship in violation of the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). In the authority and worship granted the Son, the Father has not given His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8); He has retained it for Himself in Christ Who is and always has been the radiance of His glory (Hebrews 1:3).

5:28,29 The theme of a time to come resumes. The difference is that in vv.24,25 only some of the dead heard the voice of the Son of God, namely those who as a result believed. In this segment, it is all who are in their graves who will hear His voice. Just as His word brings some to eternal life now, in the Second Coming of Christ, by the power of His word calling the dead to appear before Him, all the dead will hear – in a different sense of hearing. All will rise but to two different destinies. The text does not say that all rise to live, but only that all will rise. The future is either life or condemnation, but these eternal futures have been settled in advance. Believers have the certainty of eternal life prior to the Judgment Day; further, they have been assured in advance in the gospel of never coming under condemnation (v.24). Now the resurrection of all is either to life or condemnation. (See appendix below related to v.29, **Appendix 5A: The Good Works Controversy.**)

5:30 This verse does not mention the Father, yet it is because of Jesus’ submission to the Father that He can say what He did here. The Father has committed all judgment to Him, yet none of it will be independent of the Father, for He is the One Christ hears. Submitting to Him – for that theme is repeated here – means that even in judgment the Father’s will shall be done, and for that reason Christ assures that it shall be just.

C. Reasons for Faith and an Analysis of Unbelief, 5:31-47

After making a defense of healing on the Sabbath and ordering the invalid to take up his bed mat and walk, the Lord continued to speak of another feature of His Father's activity in Him. The Father testifies to Christ as the One men should accept. Christ elaborates on this, giving reasons for faith in Him and showing the horror of sin that would cause men to reject Him. This is a continuation of the monologue that precedes it and thus we should think that He is speaking to the same people – the same ones who challenged Him about the Sabbath and His claim of equality with God.

5:31,32 The immediate problem of translation and interpretation relates to Jesus' statement that if He testifies concerning Himself that it is not true or not valid. The word in Greek is the regular word for truth, used in Ephesians 1:13. The NIV, with reason for doing so, translates this as valid, because in John 8:13-18 validity is the point. I think in 5:30,31 Jesus is saying His judging is righteous because He hears His Father (v.30), and His testimony (v.31) is true for the same reason. If he did testify on His own He would be dishonest, since He claimed the opposite, and He would violate all He had just claimed for His ministry and speech. Thus any independent testimony from Christ would contradict His claim not speaking on His own, and so could not be true. Those who speak on their own are false prophets (v.43); Jesus was saying that He did not operate that way.

The *Another* Who testifies is the Father. This constant reference to the Father is such a regular theme in John that to say the Father each time is unnecessary. A testimony in Jesus' favor is one that agrees with what He is saying. Just how the Father specifically testifies is not given. In Western culture we dislike generalities, even when it is what we need.

5:33-35 The testimony of John the Baptist Before Jesus appeared on the public scene, many already knew that a great prophet had appeared among them. They knew John was a man sent from God (see Appendix 5B). The ministry of John was for others, so that they might be saved. This shows that to be saved we need a knowledge of Christ, and we must repent of sins.

The words of Christ in 5:16-47 are monologue. It seems He was replying to the charge (as in 8:13) that He spoke on His own authority. One of the oddest things in the NT is that the Jews required signs (1 Corinthians 1:22) to believe in Him, and they would ask for such signs just after one had been performed. This is so in chapters 5 and 6!

5:36,37 As important as the ministry of John was, the mention of him is a parenthesis. Jesus did not need John's testimony for Himself; He mentioned it for the benefit it would give them, then He returned to the testimony of the Father mentioned in v.32.

Jesus said that the work He was doing was the testimony of the Father. This may seem strange to us when we expect to hear of some testimony detached from what Jesus did to support His claims. However, whatever the Father does the Son also does (5:19), thus the Father's testimony is inherently present in all that Christ did. We should not set up our criteria for judging the transcendent God according to our expectations. This is weightier testimony.

This work is very general; it is the entire scope of work the Father gave Him. This testimony includes but is not confined to miracles. He said, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father," (John 10:32) and "the miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me," (John 10:25). Jesus emphasized how convincing the miracles should be for them, "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father," (John 10:37,38).

Sometimes it was the words of Jesus that so impressed His hearers (7:26; Matthew 7:28,29; 22:23; Mark 1:27,28; 12:17). Every time He spoke He was speaking words from His Father (3:34) and thus the great impact those words had, was the Father's testimony concerning Him. All Jesus' words were the Father doing the

Father's Work, so our Lord said: "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work," (John 14:10).

When Christ spoke of the work the Father gave Him (John 17:4), this included His sacrifice on the cross, for it too was work the Father was doing (2 Corinthians 5:19). During the time of the crucifixion the Father would bear vivid testimony to His Son. The veil of the temple would be torn in two; the sun was hidden and darkness covered the earth. The Roman soldiers interpreted it all well when they said what the Jewish leaders refused to say, "*Surely He was the Son of God!*" (Matthew 27:45, 51-54). To this we must add the greatest sign of all, the Father's reversal of the rejection of Christ when the Father raised Him from the dead. The resurrection is the strongest testimony of all that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1:4). The apostles did not report the resurrection as merely a fact of history; they emphasized that it was the Father's act (Acts 2:24,32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:34,37).

Summary: Jesus' claim of being sent from heaven was not an isolated and unsupported claim. The Father testified to sending His Son by Jesus' miracles, speaking, and offering on the cross – in fact, in all of His work.

5:37,38 Three negatives Jesus gave three kinds of encounters with the Lord that some others have had, but His opponents never experienced: God's voice, form, and Word. This has a sharp surprise in it when He included God's Word.

- God's voice: Few have heard His voice as did Moses (Numbers 7:89), and all Israel at Sinai (Deuteronomy 4 & 5), or as happened at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22). On that occasion those who felt they needed no repentance were not there to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29,30) and so missed hearing the voice of God. (The word voice is often used in a non-literal sense as in Deuteronomy 30:20, Psalm 29.)
- God's form: Few have ever seen a theophany when God assumed (temporarily) some form as in His appearance to Jacob 32:30,31¹ "You have never seen His form" is a perplexing statement especially since God as spirit has no physical form and warned so much against making any form for God. Moses reminded Israel that when God appeared at Sinai, they had seen no form of God (Deuteronomy 4:12-18).
- God's word: The Jews (of 5:10,16) might not be alarmed that they could not replicate the experiences of Moses and Israel at Sinai or Jacob at Peniel, but they were certain they had God's Word. Jesus said it did not dwell in them, as shown by their unbelief.

5:39,40 The Lord did not tell them in this instance to study the Scriptures,² rather He observed that they did study them but did not understand – a frequent criticism Jesus made of these experts in the law (Matthew 9:13, 12:7; 21:42; 22:29; 23:23). Possibly they felt that they were saved by their alleged compliance with the law, and agreement with the facts of God's Word. They were missing that Jesus Christ is the promised One God would send; then when He had sent the Christ, they did not recognize Him, in spite of all the reasons to believe found in vv.31-37 and in the recent healing of the invalid. (See the notes at John 7:41-43 and 7:50-52.) The problem, as in Matthew 23:37, was in their willful refusal to come to Christ. Twice Jesus mentions life in vv.39,40; this they were looking for elsewhere, not in Christ. They had a hope for eternal life, but it was not Christ, Who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). By reporting this detail, the Apostle John emphasized that life is in Christ alone. (For more detail on OT prediction of Christ see Appendix 5C below.)

5:41-44 In vv. 31-40 Jesus gave reasons why He should be accepted as the One the Father sent (vv.36,37). He came to what was His own, but His own people did not receive Him (1:11). In John 5 He gave multiple reasons why they should believe with a rational mind and a clear conscience. In vv. 41-44 He tells them why they refuse to come (i.e., believe, 6:35); they cannot believe when they yearn for the praise of other unbelievers. He knew all

¹ In the LXX in Genesis 32:30,31, it uses the same Greek word for "form."

² In Greek the verb can be either imperative or indicative. The context, in my opinion, strongly favors the indicative as in the NIV.

men (2:24) and said He knew they had no love for God, thus they reject the One He sent, while they readily accept the claims of spurious messiahs. They lived for the approving praise of those whose favor they lusted after (12:43). The Lord was very frank: they would follow self-appointed masters. Such charlatans had no approval in Scripture, no working of the God in their “ministry” and no introduction by either the prophets of old or John the Baptist, yet the Jewish leaders would accept people who came in their own name. With Jesus they would demand a sign after He had given many. When He answered their questions and objections, they were unmoved. When Scripture pointed to Him, they dismissed the Word of God. When they had no real reason to reject Him, they remained in unbelief, which was their settled policy. Hating the light, they loved their darkness and the support of those who also loved it; (1:4,5; 3:19,20). Jesus testified to what He had seen and heard at His Father’s side (1:18), but no one accepted His testimony (3:32).

In contrast to their principles, Jesus did not accept the testimony of men (v.34), for what motivated Him was the approval (6:27), will (4:34), work (9:4), love (5:20) and testimony of God (v.31,36). They lived for the praise of each other, without being born from above (3:5). In such a condition Jesus asks how they can ever believe; they cannot. The supposed “free will” of man does not exist unless the will has been freed by the Lord from its bondage in darkness.

5:45-47 The Lord returned to their reading of Scripture. Sometimes the OT is referred to as the *law and the prophets*, sometimes just *law*, sometimes by the human author/complier – *Moses*. They hoped for eternal life without the Messiah Moses pointed to. Abraham looked forward to Jesus (8:56), and Moses wrote of Him (v. 46). Scripture was a testimony to Christ, yet their reading with willful blindness prevented them from identifying Him. They declined Scriptures’ enlightenment and so would suffer its accusation on the Judgment Day. Their interpretations had support among those who agreed with each other in unbelief. The Lord would not need to accuse them; their guilt would be established by the word they diligently studied (v.39) and arrogantly refused to accept. The scrolls they read every Sabbath even predicted the murder they would soon commit:

The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. Acts 13:27-29

Perhaps these words from Deuteronomy in the law of Moses were in the Lord’s mind when He said Moses would accuse them.

"Now write down ... this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath."

... After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die! Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them. For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made." Deuteronomy 31:19-29

Appendix 5A: The Good Works Controversy

Two groups facing judgment are described in 5:29: a) *those who have done good* and b) *those who have done evil*. Jesus did not say that doing good is what settles the eternal life of those who rise to live. When false teachers inject that meaning, they assume a view not found in this text. In our day there is a resurgence of moralism among evangelicals, even though moralism is the very antithesis of an evangelical faith. What Christ does in v.29 is describe the difference in the ones who will rise at His voice: some have done good and some have done evil. In a number of places the Bible describes believers as those who love God (Romans 8:28), those who obey (Hebrews 5:9), and those who look for His coming (Hebrews 9:28). Never does the Bible teach that we are justified by loving, or obeying, or waiting. Never does the Bible confuse us by suggesting that the result of faith in Christ (a sanctified life) adds anything to faith as the sole requirement of a sinner for justification. Lately some, even in reformed circles, are determined to distort justification by adding works to faith alone. In that error, works are required to *secure* eternal life, rather than *reveal* that new life is present. Jesus taught that those who believe are guaranteed that they will never face condemnation (John 5:24) when they rise to live. Jesus' words in 5:24 indicate that the "final justification" happens the moment a person believes.

"*Those who have done good*" are people with genuine personal righteousness. The doctrine Christ gave in v.29 is taught in other passages as well: all who believe have been brought to personal holiness (Hebrews 12:14); each one produces a good crop (Matthew 13:23). Their fruit *shows* that they are His disciples (John 15:8). Sometimes we are identified by our words as in Romans 10:9,13, but at other times believers are "those who have done good," i.e., they are recognized by good works. Christians gain eternal life as a gift (John 6:27,32,33; Romans 6:23). This gift is so consistently a gift that requiring works to have it, changes eternal life from a gift of God into wages earned (Romans 4:4). Those who would live in sin must remember that true eternal life is active in making its recipients do what is good. When forgiving, God looks only at their faith without works, but when declaring to the universe who are really His, He may refer to works as the result of faith. He will raise "those who have done good to the resurrection of life," (v.29). Scripture does not set two virtues against each other. Confession is also very important as in 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 John 7; and Matthew 10:32,33. Anyone can fake the words, but works done in loving obedience (14:21,24) are the indicator Christ pointed to in John 5:29.

Moralists can be very zealous (Galatians 4:17). Some argue the same error from Matthew 25 when it speaks of the final judgment. In that text, there is again the division of the righteous and the wicked. Matthew 25 does not say that by means of their righteousness men inherit the eternal kingdom. When there is no Scripture to teach an error, there is always a great passion to find one! Matthew 25 is a text often used this way. Those who receive their kingdom inheritance in Matthew 25:34, receive it as a gift. We cannot change the gift nature of this inheritance without changing the gospel itself. (See Acts 20:32; Galatians 3:18 and Ephesians 1:13,14.) The righteous who are told to come to receive their inheritance have been *blessed* by the Father. It is not that their works gain this blessing on that day! The grammar is clear. The verb for *blessed* in Matthew 25:34 is a perfect passive participle, therefore: a) the righteous were blessed by the Lord in a blessing they did not acquire by their action but His. (That is the passive aspect.) b) the blessing brought to them occurred in the past and continued from then. "Come, you who have been blessed..." shows that the blessing itself had happened prior to the Judgment Day. Therefore the Judgment Day does not finally decide for the righteous whether they will inherit the kingdom. According to 5:24, their eternal well-being had been secured for them when they believed. Matthew 25 teaches that on that Day those who have been justified already will be identified and recognized before the world as righteous. This righteousness is *demonstrated* by the multitude of good works the Lord points to. These good works were not the object of the trust of the righteous, because they are surprised by the good they did! (Matthew 25:37-39) Their good works are the result of being blessed by the Father – blessed with: eternal life, the Holy Spirit's good fruit, salvation that began when they believed, and love for their neighbor. It is this prior salvation and transformation that causes them to be described in John 5:29 as "those who have done good" and in Matthew 25:37 as "righteous"

An illustration: As I type these notes, my wife and I are in a cottage overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca between Canada and the USA. It is morning and two kinds of birds are on the lawn. One kind jumped around and stood still waiting to pull worms from the ground. The other bird picked seeds from the surface, but not worms. I can say one is a robin for it did what robins do: it hopped along the ground, then stood still and then pulled up a worm. In this way I have identified the bird by its actions as true to its nature as a robin. In teaching about salvation, Scripture often identifies Christians by their actions. This is very different from saying that by actions one becomes a Christian. I could not go to the other bird, the black one eating seeds, and tell it what to do to become a robin. Any teacher who confuses becoming a Christian with being a Christian does

not understand Christian doctrine related to the Bible's strong denial of good works to gain a gift. Then, in other places the Bible is fervent to affirm good works as evidence of spiritual life.

Another important place where good works is taught is James 2:14-26. James warns against a false faith, one without works. That kind of faith does not save, simply because it is not faith at all. If it has no works, it is dead. The real faith of Abraham was made complete by his obedience. James did not confuse Abraham's faith with his actions, in fact James speaks of them as distinct. Works are not a synonym for justifying faith but a complement to it. Abraham had been declared righteous when he believed, and was considered righteous by observers when he acted. So it is with all mankind. God declares the sinner righteous when he believes, but shows he is righteous when he obeys. The ultimate occasion for public identification of the righteous is the Judgment Day when God will openly display His own before the universe by the good works that give such evidence of the blessing of salvation. Thus other Scriptures make the same sober point as John 5:28,29.

Appendix 5B: John the Baptist, a Lamp that Burned and Gave Light, John 5:35

John the Baptist was a servant of Christ, sent by God (John 1:6) to serve as His messenger (Mark 1:2) to introduce the Messiah to Israel (Luke 1:76, John 1:31) and bring many in Israel back to the Lord (Luke 1:16). He was an austere man preaching in the desert, shunning the comforts of city life (Luke 7:24-26, Mark 1:6). John was the last in the line of prophets that preceded Christ, one recognized by all the people (Matthew 21:26), a prophet greater than a prophet (Matthew 11:9), the Elijah promised in Malachi 4:5,6 (Matthew 11:14; 17:11-14; Luke 1:17). He was a lamp that shone brightly for a brief time (John 5:35). Those who heard and accepted his baptism and message acknowledged that God's way was right (Luke 7:29,30).

John was sent from God not to perform miracles (10:41) but to baptize and preach. His baptism of repentance was unto forgiveness of sins. He preached the good news (Luke 3:18) of the King and His kingdom. He denied with true humility that he was the Christ (John 1:26,27; 3:27-30), proclaiming that the One to follow was so great he was not worthy to remove His sandals. He proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God and the Son of God (John 1:29,34). Only the Apostle John reports John the Baptist saying that his ministry was predicted in Isaiah 40. By doing so he indicated that Jesus, Whom he was introducing, was indeed the Lord (John 1:23).

Noted for his courageous and even severe tone, John not only challenged the people generally, calling the crowds snakes (Luke 3:7), he did not soften his criticism of soldiers (Luke 3:14) and even Herod (Luke 3:19). His message of repentance was a denunciation of sin. Just as Abel was the first to die in human history, not Cain, it was John the righteous man who was imprisoned and beheaded. Jesus pointed to the rejection of John as a link to the crucifixion that was ahead of Him.

John's ministry was a brief and intense moment in redemption history. He knew only what the Lord had given him when the word of God came to Him (Luke 3:2). Neither he nor his disciples had the full revelation of the NT (Matthew 11:2-6, Acts 18:24-26). He knew judgment was imminent (Luke 3:7-9), and this added great urgency to his preaching, a good example for all who speak to men today, each of which is going to hell or heaven forever. John came to show the way of righteousness (Matthew 21:32) and the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77).

When God sent this messenger to introduce the Savior, it was an earthshaking event. Even Herod liked to listen to him (Mark 6:20). All Jerusalem went out to hear him preach (Mark 1:5). Delegations from the religious leadership went to check on him (John 1:19), just as they did with Christ (Matthew 15:1). Many repented, yet the nation did not believe (Matthew 21:32). John was a lamp that gave light, so that through him, all men might believe (John 1:7). God was making a huge impression on Israel; the people knew this was a true prophet, so the tenacious unbelief of those who rejected God's purpose when they refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29,30), later made them guilty for rejecting the Messiah John introduced. Jesus reminded those who would reject Him that for a while they had chosen to enjoy the light that John's ministry was. In spite of all this, they would still refuse to come to Jesus for eternal life (John 5:40). They shut their eyes to John the lamp, and Christ the light (John 8:12), and so became blind (John 9:39-41) to what God was doing before their eyes. They rejected the voice of God in John the Baptist (Isaiah 40:3) and so never heard the voice of God in any sense (John 5:37,38).

Appendix 5C: The Testimony of the Old Testament to Christ

The Apostle John says in five places that the OT speaks of Christ, without specific quotations (1:45, 2:22, 5:45-47, & 20:9). Jesus did the same thing in Luke 24:44-47. Good generalities are very helpful! John is simply saying that the Scripture is about Christ. Of course it is not of Christ in every word, but the core of all previous promise and revelation was of the Mediator to come. The religious experts in the law could read, quote and discuss the words of the text without coming to Christ for life. In Matthew 2:1-8 they told Herod from the Prophet Micah where Christ would be born, but in Matthew's record of the visit it was made only by foreigners, not leaders of Israel.

Prediction is a powerful way God shows His glory as God (Isaiah 41:26-29; 48:3-7). In my opinion we should emphasize this feature of God's revelation more. To make the identity of the coming Messiah unmistakable, God gave so much detail in advance that the whole quantity of revelation could apply to one person only, Jesus of Nazareth.

He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5) in a narrow space of time under the Romans (Daniel 9) with most of His ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9). He would be in the line of Abraham and David, (see the box at 8:52). His birth to a virgin mother (Isaiah 7) meant that the denial of the throne to Jehoiakim's sons (Jeremiah 36:30,31) and Jehoiachin's offspring (Jeremiah 22:28-30) would not apply to the son of the virgin!

The Messiah would be announced by an Elijah-like man (Malachi 4) crying out in the desert (Isaiah 40). The Anointed Messiah's ministry of mercy would fulfill Isaiah 61. The effect of His proclamation would reach all nations (Isaiah 42 & 49). He would serve as a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35), not in the line of Aaron but in the order of Melchizedek, yet He would be king in the line of David, a King Who is the Son of God (Psalm 2) and Son of Man (Daniel 7). Unlike other prophets, but like Moses, He would be a prophet who talks with God face to face (Deuteronomy 18; 34:10-12). Thus, Jesus alone in all of Israel would be prophet, priest and king – with each element of this three-fold office predicted in advance.

After entering Jerusalem on a colt (Zechariah 9:9), as a priest he would make His offering. The suffering and resurrection are described in Psalm 22. The rejection by and salvation of His people was predicted in Isaiah 52,53 – a Scripture that spells out the purpose and meaning of the death of Christ more fully than the four Gospels combined! He would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41) and offer His body (LXX of Psalm 40), including His back and cheeks (Isaiah 50). He would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). His body would not see decay (Psalm 16), but *“after the suffering of His soul, He would see the light of life”* (Isaiah 53:11) when raised from the dead.

When Jesus said “These are the Scriptures that testify about Me,” (John 5:39) He stated what ought to be obvious truth, but when the human heart has other interests than the love of God, (John 5:42) men will refuse to come to have life (John 5:40) no matter how clear the revelation. No matter how clear the picture, the willfully blind shall not see it!