

John 5:24-47

This passage starts with one of the favorite gospel verses in the Bible. Many have received the gift of eternal life through its message. It sets forth the pathway of salvation so clearly.

What does Jesus mean when He says “Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life” (v. 24)? Jesus lifts Himself far above the level of any mere man. This is either the babbling of an insane man or the words of God Himself. The message to the Jews is that salvation has nothing to do with your relationship with Abraham. This is all about a different relationship. Note that it does not say that he *will* have eternal life but that he has it right now.

“.....and will not be condemned....” He will never be condemned because Jesus has paid the penalty for his sins on the Cross. God will not demand the payment of this penalty twice. The Christian will never be punished for his sins.

“.....he has crossed over from death to life.” He has passed out of a state of spiritual death into one of spiritual life. Before conversion, he was dead in trespasses and in sins. When he put his faith in Jesus Christ, he was indwelt by the Spirit of God and became a possessor of divine life.¹

Why is Jesus having life in Himself significant (v. 26)? Just as the Father is the source and giver of life, so he has decreed that the Son too has life in Himself and should be able to give it to others -- a distinct statement as to the deity of Christ and His equality/unity with the Father – a prominent theme found throughout this passage. Unlike God, we do not have life in ourselves. We inherit it from our parents.

Why has God given the Son authority to judge (v. 27)? Jesus can judge humanity because He belongs to humanity and understands it. He is one of us. He is the Anointed One whom God has sent, but He is also fully human. Because He is both God and Man, He alone is perfectly qualified to be Judge.²

What is the point Jesus is making (vv. 28-30)? Jesus makes it very clear that a time is coming when He will raise all the dead from the grave and call them to judgment—not only those who are saved, but those who are not. The righteous dead will experience the resurrection resulting in eternal life. The unrighteous dead will experience the resurrection resulting in eternal condemnation.

Verse 29 does *not* teach that people who have done good will be saved because of their good deeds, and those who have done evil will be condemned because of their wicked lives. A person is not saved by doing good, but he does good because he has been saved. Good works are not the root of salvation but rather the fruit. They are not the cause, but the effect. Believers are those who do good, which in this context means believing in the Son (6:29). The expression those who have done evil describes those who have never put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, and consequently whose lives have been evil in the sight of God. These will be raised to stand before God and to be sentenced to eternal doom.³

In the Bible, *judgment* is always based on works (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12; 22:12) while *salvation* is always based on faith and is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Condemnation is always because of the failure to believe, i.e., the willful rejection of Jesus Christ.

What is Jesus saying (v. 30)? Jesus' point was that He could not do anything independently of the Father because of His submission to Him. His "judgment" is the result of listening to His Father. His judgment "is just" because the desire for self-glory does not taint it. The Son's will is totally to advance the Father's will.⁴

v. 31 The witness of a single person was not considered sufficient evidence in a court of law. The law required two or three witnesses for a valid judgment to be rendered. Jesus then proceeds to list four valid witnesses to His deity.

Who is the first witness (v. 32, 37)? His Father. **When was the Father a witness?** At Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17). At the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). He spoke at both events identifying Jesus as His Son.

Who is the second witness (vv. 32-35)? John the Baptist. Jesus knew that His critics would not accept the Father's witness to His identity even though Jesus claimed that His words lined up with the Father's will. He could not prove this claim to their satisfaction. Therefore He cited another human witness who testified about Jesus' identity, namely, John the Baptist.⁵

Jesus did not need human testimony, but John's work helped people because in their darkness he pointed them to the light⁶ (John 1:7) and to the Lamb (John 1:36).

What did He mean in v. 34 about being saved? He was bringing before them these wonderful truths in order that they (who hate Him and soon would be seeking to take His life) might realize who He was and accept Him as the promised Messiah. . This verse gives us a clear view of the loving and tender heart of the Lord Jesus. There was no hatred in His heart for His enemies. He could only love them.

Who is the third witness (v. 36)? The witness of the works of Jesus. These works included all of Jesus' activities, including His miracles, His life of perfect obedience, and His work of redemption on the cross.

How does the Lord's tone change (vv. 37-38)? The tone of our Lord's "defense" changes, and we see Him now taking the offensive and challenging the Jews who oppose Him. He not only admonishes them for not receiving God's witness, He informs them of the reason why they rejected Him as the Messiah.....His word does not dwell in them.

Who is the fourth witness (v. 39)? The witness of the Scriptures. The Jews' failure to recognize Jesus as the prophesied Messiah testified to their lack of understanding the true message of Scripture.

In this teaching, Jesus claims that the Old Testament Scriptures are from God and are fulfilled in Him, that the unbelieving Jews have perverted the Old Testament and misunderstood it. Like John the Baptist, the Old Testament pointed away from itself to Jesus.

He now cites several reasons for the unbelief of the Jews (vv. 40-43).

#1 Reason for unbelief (v. 40)? Pride!! They refuse to come to Jesus to have life. They think they already have life because they are children of Abraham. To be saved, a person must humbly admit that they are a sinner, deserving of God's eternal wrath, and by faith accept God's grace as a gift. The self-righteous find this highly offensive.

#2 Reason for unbelief (v. 42)? They do not have the love of God in their hearts. They love themselves instead. We see that these reasons essentially have to do with the heart, not with the mind. People often hide behind intellectual excuses or questions, but the bottom line is that they have a heart problem with Jesus, not a head problem. You can answer all their questions and they still will not believe.

#3 Reason for unbelief (v. 43)? When someone else comes in his own name, proclaiming himself to be the Messiah, they will eagerly accept him. So it will be in the end times when the anti-Christ comes. Anytime a person rejects Jesus, it leaves them open to tremendous deception.

#4 Reason for unbelief (v. 44)? They were more interested in the approval of their fellow men than in God's approval. They were not willing to endure the reproach and suffering which would come with becoming followers of Christ. They consistently chose what was popular over what was true.

How did they reject the testimony of Jesus that came through Moses (vv. 45-47)? Moses accused them because Moses wrote about Jesus and they refused to receive the testimony of Moses. Even though the Jews took great pride in their attachment to Moses, and the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) which he wrote, they rejected his testimony about Jesus. *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him!"* (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Christ is a "blind spot" for the Jews, and yet He is both the central figure and the key to the Old Testament Scriptures. Because the Jews are blind to Christ, they read the Old Testament as though a veil were over their eyes. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ is that veil removed. Then the Scriptures become clear, and the glory of the Lord is revealed, transforming those who believe into His image.

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1494.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 1495.

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on John, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 163.

⁵ Ibid., 165.

⁶ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 292.