

## **The Gospel of John (31); The Third Discourse of Jesus (1)**

### **Introduction:**

Last Lord's Day we considered *the third sign of Jesus* recorded in John's Gospel in which He healed of the lame man on the Sabbath Day. The episode before us follows and flows from that event. It is a prolonged speech of Jesus, which has been commonly called, *the third discourse of Jesus*. The actual speech, or discourse of Jesus, begins with verse 19 and continues to the end of the chapter, verse 47. Here is a summary of the overarching theme of this sermon of Jesus:

Jesus is so intimately connected to the Father that there is nothing God has ever done in history (e.g., the Baptist; Scripture) or in Himself (the Trinity) that is exclusive of Jesus. Everything God has ever said and done is now in His hands. To reject Jesus is not only disbelief in God but is also a revealing depiction of the true object of humanity's faith—the self.<sup>1</sup>

Today we will only consider the first portion of this passage in which this discourse is found. We will examine the meaning and implications of verses 16 through 23, which read as follows:

<sup>16</sup>For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

<sup>18</sup>Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. <sup>19</sup>Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup>For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Here we read of the unbelief and dishonor showed to Jesus by "the Jews", which we should understand here as "the Jewish leaders." In failing to honor Jesus as God's Son, they were also failing to honor God His Father, the one they believed and claimed to have been their God. In this episode of John's Gospel we will have reinforced for us the truths of the deity of the Lord Jesus, the relationship and cooperation between the Son and the Father in the work of divine providence within the world, and of the responsibility that the Father has entrusted to His Son to accomplish His will in history and at the final judgment of all mankind. Everything in the passage before us ultimately instructs us that we are to honor Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who is the Second Person of the Blessed Holy Trinity. And in honoring the Son, we do honor the Father.

Now the passage we read above is the New King James Version (NKJV). Thankfully there are no major textual variants between Greek manuscripts, as there were in the passage we considered last Lord's Day. However, we should point out the difference in the division of the paragraphs in the NKJV and, say, the English Standard Version (ESV) and the New International Version (NIV).

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 279.

The original Greek texts of the first century had no paragraph designations. Paragraph divisions are a rather modern invention.<sup>2</sup> The designation of paragraphs, therefore, is supplied by the translators of the Bible. Here the translators of the NKJV distinguished a paragraph containing verses 16 and 17, with a new paragraph beginning with verse 18 that continues through verse 23. The ESV, however, has verses 16 and 17 with the previous passage, and then designates a paragraph with the single sentence of verse 18. Then a new paragraph begins with verse 19. The NIV, however, has its paragraph divisions including verses 9 through 17 and then a new paragraph begins with verse 18. Here are the paragraph divisions of these English translations:

The **NKJV** reads:

<sup>12</sup>Then they asked him, “Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” <sup>13</sup>But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place. <sup>14</sup>Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

<sup>15</sup>The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

<sup>16</sup>For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

<sup>18</sup>Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. <sup>19</sup>Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner...

The **ESV** reads:

Now that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” <sup>11</sup>But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” <sup>12</sup>They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” <sup>13</sup>Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. <sup>14</sup>Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” <sup>15</sup>The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. <sup>16</sup>And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

<sup>18</sup>This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

<sup>19</sup>So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

The **NIV** reads:

<sup>14</sup>Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” <sup>15</sup>The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

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<sup>2</sup> A paragraph is a way to divide writing into shorter subjects; each paragraph expresses a separate idea. It has been said that two doctors shared credit for inventing the paragraph - Dr. Lorenzo Graph and Dr. Ermentrude Graph - as they shared a last name, they named their invention the “pair of graphs,” which has since degraded into the word “paragraph.” I do not know if this is true. [http://www.answers.com/Q/Who\\_invented\\_the\\_paragraph](http://www.answers.com/Q/Who_invented_the_paragraph)

<sup>16</sup>So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. <sup>17</sup>In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” <sup>18</sup>For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

<sup>19</sup>Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Aside from those English translations, the editors of the modern **Greek New Testament** placed their paragraph divisions in this way:

<sup>15</sup>ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἀνήγγειλεν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὸν ὑγιῆ. <sup>16</sup>καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὅτι ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ. <sup>17</sup>ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο αὐτοῖς· Ὁ πατὴρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται καὶ γὰρ ἐργάζομαι. <sup>18</sup>διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἔλυε τὸ σάββατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγε τὸν θεόν, ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ.

<sup>19</sup>Ἀπεκρίνατο οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔλεγε αὐτοῖς. Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν ἐὰν μὴ τι βλέπη τὸν πατέρα ποιοῦντα· ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ, ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ. <sup>20</sup>ὁ γὰρ πατὴρ φιλεῖ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ πάντα δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ ἃ αὐτὸς ποιεῖ, καὶ μεῖζονα τούτων δείξει αὐτῷ ἔργα, ἵνα ὑμεῖς θαυμάζητε.<sup>3</sup>

Now I know that the Greek text is meaningless to most of us, nevertheless you can clearly see the manner in which the editors designated the paragraphs of this passage. They connect verses 16 through verse 18 with the previous paragraph, or context. I think that this should be the preferred division of this passage. I believe the NKJV (particularly as it is set forth in the Reformation Study Bible with a subheading before verse 16), does not lend itself to understand the verses in context. Had I noticed these differences in paragraph divisions before last Sunday, we would have more directly connected verses 16 through 18 with the previous account of Jesus healing the lame man.

We will first consider what John sought to reveal in these verses, and then we will draw some conclusions and application for us.

## **I. Consideration of the meaning of John’s statements**

Let us now read the passage from the NKJV. However, I am going to reorder the sentences into the paragraphs which are more suitable to convey the context.

<sup>15</sup>The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. <sup>16</sup>For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” <sup>18</sup>Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

<sup>19</sup>Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup>For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to

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<sup>3</sup> Kurt Aland, et. al., eds., **The Greek New Testament**, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (United Bible Societies, n1966, 1968, 1975), pp. 339f.

the Son,<sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

First, let us consider the wonder of these words which are before us. They are very profound and, therefore, not easily understood. **J. C. Ryle** wrote of these words of our Lord:

These verses begin one of the most deep and solemn passages in the four Gospels. They show us the Lord Jesus asserting His own Divine nature, His unity with the God the Father, and the high dignity of His office. Nowhere does our Lord dwell so fully on these subjects as in the chapter before us. And nowhere, we must confess, do we find out so thoroughly the weakness of man's understanding! There is much, we must all feel, that is far beyond our comprehension in our Lord's account of Himself. Such knowledge, in short, is too wonderful for us. "It is high: we cannot attain to it" (Psa. 139:6). How often men say that they want clear explanations of such doctrines as the Trinity. Yet here we have our Lord handling the subject of His own Person, and, behold, we cannot follow Him! We seem to only to touch His meaning with the tip of our fingers.<sup>4</sup>

#### **A. The persecution of Jesus by the Jewish leaders (5:15-18)**

We read in verses 15 through 18 of the persecution of Jesus by the Jewish leaders. Of course all of the opposition to Jesus during His earthly ministry was groundless. Those who accused Him did so falsely, but they were ignorant of their folly and error. They had certain religious perceptions and understandings by which they assessed the world about them. They thought that they were seeing things rightly, that they were judging matters according to the will of God, but they were sorely mistaken. They thought that they were serving God and pleasing God, but again, they were sorely mistaken. Religious zeal without truth as its foundation, is not only errant, but murderous.

Jesus had healed this man who had been lame for 38 years, but He had done so on a Sabbath Day. The Jews would press their case against anyone who would dare do such a thing. But the Jewish leaders did not know the identity of the one who had healed the man. The man himself did not know the identity of His benefactor. But then later, Jesus found this man in the temple. The Lord sharply admonished him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (5:14). The man then went immediately to the Jewish leaders and gave them the identity of Him who had been so gracious to him. We read in **verse 15**, "*The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.*" The result is that the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him. **Verse 16** reads, "*For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.*"

There were long-observed laws respecting what was permissible on the Sabbath day. As we pointed out last week, many of these laws observed by the Jews were not to be found in the Holy Scriptures themselves, but were "interpretations" and "extrapolations" of rabbis' opinions on the Law of Moses. But when these Jews accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus did not attempt to defend Himself by citing true laws over against false laws of Sabbath keeping; He did that elsewhere (Cf. Matt. 12:9-14). Rather here, Jesus acknowledged that He had been working on the Sabbath, but that He had only been doing what God His Father had been doing throughout the history of the world. We read of His response in **verse 17**: "*But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'*" To accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath would be the same as accusing God the Father of breaking the Sabbath.

The Sabbath Day had its origin in the Genesis account of creation. God created all things in 6 days and then He rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, which was the first Sabbath Day in the history of the world. We read of this in **Genesis 2:1-3**:

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 278.

had done. <sup>3</sup>*Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*

God had completed His creation of the heavens and the earth on the sixth day. He ceased from His work on the seventh day. And when it records that God rested from His work, it was saying that God rested from His work *of creating*. His rest was a time of His joyous reflection and enjoyment of all that He had created. He delighted in what He had created in the six days of creation. But God is not only the Creator of all things, but He is the Governor, or the Provider of all things. And His work of Providence continued on that first Sabbath Day and through every day and night since the original creation.

Jesus declared the ongoing, ceaseless activity of the Father, even on the Sabbath Day. Again, it is declared in verse 17, *“But Jesus answered them, My Father has been working until now.”* Jesus indicated that God had been continually working. Actually, although the NKJV translates the verb in the past tense—*“has been working”*, the ESV and NIV translate the Greek verb correctly as present tense, emphasizing God’s continuous working. The ESV reads, *“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’”* And the NIV translates the verse, *“In his defense Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.’”* There has never been a time that God was not working, and what Jesus was implying, including every Sabbath Day.

But Jesus not only declared in verse 17, *“My Father has been working until now”*, but He also declared, *“and I have been working.”* And just as the ESV and NIV rightly translated the Greek verb as God continuously working, so those two translations correctly convey the Greek verb in this clause. Jesus said that He is continuously working. The ESV translates this clause in this way: *“and I am working.”* The NIV translates it, *“and I too am working.”* Jesus was declaring that His working was in conjunction with His Father’s working.

Just as the Father is providentially controlling every detail in every person’s life in every way throughout every day, so was Jesus. Jesus healing this lame man and commanding him to take up his bed and walk, was simply God His Father working, and He along with His Father working, to bring to pass His eternal decree. It was God’s work of providence that Jesus was accomplishing, working in conjunction with His Father. Even though God was incarnate in the Son of God, even during His incarnation, His divine nature was working with God in the governing providence of this world.

Jesus Christ is eternal God, even the begotten Son of God from eternity. And even when the divine nature embodied *fully* in Jesus on earth, having joined His human nature unto His eternal, His divine nature, He was not limited to the human body of Jesus. His divine nature continued to preserve and direct the entire creation in its course to fulfill the eternal decree of God. Although the divine nature fully dwelt in the human nature (body and soul) of Jesus (cf. Col. 2:9), His divine nature as the eternal Son of God was not limited to the human body of Jesus. His divine nature was still an omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent Spirit, existing everywhere, fully sustaining and directing His creation according to the eternal decree of the Triune God. His Father was (is) working and He was (is) working.

And so, when Jesus spoke of God working, He was referring to God’s ongoing work of *providence*, His sustaining and controlling of His creation in its day-to-day existence. It may be argued that God the Father was even “working” on that first Sabbath day, that is, in respect to His on-going preservation and governance of His creation. God’s work of providence has never known a pause or break in time. God not only created all things, but He also controls or governs all things that transpire in history.

Jesus points to the unceasing activity of the Father. Without Him this whole created universe would cease. Unless He works continually no man could survive. And because of His close relationship with the Father Jesus works in the same way. The Sabbath cannot interfere with the work of such a One.<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, what do we mean by divine providence? Providence is God bringing to pass in history His decree established in eternity. In our confession of faith there is a statement about the providence of God. There we may read this statement:

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 309.

God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (Baptist Confession of 1689, Art. 5, par. 1)

We would say “Amen” to that statement for it is a true and accurate reflection of Biblical teaching.

Understanding God’s providence should bring great comfort and encouragement to the people of God. Here are the words of **Charles Spurgeon** on this matter, as he had sought to encourage Christians:

This thought of the directness of the Divine operations must be carried into Providence. It will greatly comfort you if you can see God’s hand in your losses and crosses. Surely you will not murmur against the direct agency of your God! This will put an extraordinary sweetness into daily mercies, and make the comforts of life more comfortable still, because they are from a Father’s hand. If your table is scantily furnished it shall suffice for your contented heart when you know that your Father spread it for you in wisdom and love. This shall bless your bread and your water! This shall make the bare walls of an ill-furnished room as resplendent as a palace, and turn a hard bed into a couch of down.

My Father does it all. We see His smile of love even when others see nothing but the black hand of Death smiting our best beloved. We see a Father’s hand when the pestilence lays our cattle dead upon the plain. We see God at work in mercy when we ourselves are stretched upon the bed of languishing. It is ever our Father’s act and deed! Do not let us get beyond this—but rather let us enlarge our view of this Truth of God and remember that this is true of the little as well as of the great. Let the lines of a true poet strike you—“If pestilence stalks through the land, you say the Lord has done it—has He not done it when an aphid creeps upon the rosebud? If an avalanche tumbles from its Alp, you tremble at the will of Providence—is not that will as much concerned when the sere leaves fall from the poplar?” Let your hearts sing of everything—Jehovah-Shammah—the Lord is there.<sup>6</sup>

And we say, “Amen” to Spurgeon’s words of comfort to the Christian. The doctrine of God’s providence is a comforting, and heart-settling doctrine of God’s Word.

And yet, even though our Lord Jesus was affirming this glorious, consoling doctrine of God’s providence and His own part in bringing it to pass, it angered the Jewish leaders to move desire to murder Jesus. Jesus answered the charge of breaking the Sabbath with the assertion that He was working along with His Father who was also working on the Sabbath Day. Again, **verse 17** records Jesus’ response to His accusers: **“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’**” (5:17).

We read that the Jews reacted angrily to Jesus when He called God “My Father” in verse 17. When Jesus spoke intimately of God as “My Father”, He was claiming something that no other Jew would have dared to do.

The expression “My Father” is noteworthy. It was not the way Jews usually referred to God. Usually they spoke of “our Father”, and while they might use “My Father” in prayer they would qualify it with “in heaven” or some other expression to remove the suggestion of familiarity. Jesus did no such thing, here or elsewhere. He habitually thought of God as in the closest relationship to Himself. The expression implies a claim which the Jews did not miss.<sup>7</sup>

We read of their reaction in **verse 18**: **“Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.”**

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 12, sermon 668.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, p. 309.

The Jewish leaders immediately saw the implication of Jesus' words. He called God "My Father." This added another reason to kill Him. He had not only broken the Sabbath, but He was guilty of blasphemy, claiming to be equal with God.

The Jews did not miss the significance of Jesus' words. He had called God "his own Father", and this meant that He was "making himself equal with God" (cf. 10:33)... Jesus was not teaching men that God is the Father of all. The Jews would have accepted this. He was claiming that God was His Father in a special sense. He was claiming that He partook of the same nature as His Father. This involved equality. So the Jews held that He was guilty of blasphemy as well as of Sabbath breaking. They discerned that the Sabbath breaking was no isolated rootless phenomenon. It proceeded from Jesus' view of His person and was consistent with it. But to them it was nothing less than blasphemy. It led them to unremitting efforts ("sought" is in a continuous tense) to secure His death.<sup>8</sup>

In their minds, Jesus was the most evil of people. He was not only a Sabbath breaker, but worse, He was a blasphemer. They were convinced that He was deserving of death, and to be shamed in His death due to His great sin.

They immediately understood that Jesus claimed for Himself deity in the highest possible sense of that term. That claim was either the most wicked blasphemy, to be punished with death: or else, it was the most glorious truth, to be accepted by faith. The very character of the sign which Jesus had just now performed should have caused these religious leaders to adopt the latter alternative. Instead, they chose the former.<sup>9</sup>

The Jews understood clearly the implication of Jesus' words. He was claiming equality with God the Father. Here we see the deity of the Lord Jesus set before us. Now there are those who say that they are Christians, but they deny that Jesus is God incarnate. One common argument they give is that although Jesus was the Son of God, He was not God Himself. The Jews understood this idea of His Sonship quite differently. They knew the implication of Jesus' words. Jesus was asserting that He was God. The Jews understood exactly what Jesus was claiming for Himself.

## **B. The Third Discourse of Jesus (5:19-47)**

We next read in **verses 19ff** that Jesus expressed His oneness with the Father in the purpose and in the work that He had performed and would perform in history.

<sup>19</sup>Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup>For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

### **1. The Son of God does what the Father does (John 5:19)**

We read verse 19:

***"Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.'"***

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 309f.

<sup>9</sup> William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 196.

The Jewish leaders had accused Jesus of blaspheming God and breaking His Sabbath ordinance. Jesus declared this to be a false charge, for “the Son” can do nothing of Himself. It is not possible that the Son think or act independently or in cross-purposes with His “Father.” They do the same things. The Father and the Son have the same desires, goals, and plans. They work together in perfect harmony and coordination.

***Here we see the divine persons of the Father and the Son manifesting different properties.*** This is very important in distinguishing between the persons of the Trinity. In other words, even though the Father and the Son are two persons of the One true God (with the Holy Spirit), and He is “but one only living and true God”, and even though this One God manifests Himself in three co-eternal, co-equal persons, nevertheless, there are some things that distinguish God the Father from God the Son and from God the Holy Spirit. These differences are not in essence, for the three Persons of the Trinity are one in essence: There is only One God. But there are differences in their roles and the manner in which they manifest their godhead.

Our confession of faith states the matter rightly

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: ***the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations;*** which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him. (Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, Art. 2, Par. 3)

The emboldened words describe the distinctions between the three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. And the distinctions between the Father and the Son are set forth for us here in John 5:19. The Son does what He sees the Father do. This can never be reversed. It can never be said that the Father does whatever He sees the Son do. Here is a good setting forth of this distinction:

Though He is the unique Son of God, and may truly be called God (1:1, 18. 20:28) and take to Himself divine titles (e.g. 8:58) and, as in this context, divine rights (5:17), yet He is always submissive to His Father (8:29), but He *can do only what He sees His Father doing*. In this sense the relationship between Father and the Son is not reciprocal. It is inconceivable that John could say that the Father does only what He sees the Son doing. That would be preposterous not only in the cultural understanding of father-son relationships, but also in John’s understanding of the relationship between Jesus and His heavenly Father. The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions, grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs His Father’s will, receives authority. In this sense, the Son is the Father’s agent, though, as John goes on to insist, much more than an agent.<sup>10</sup>

The last clause of verse 19 begins with the English word, “for.” Actually the following three clauses also begin with this same explanatory conjunction, which introduces an explanatory clause, an explanation.

## **2. The Father loves the Son and Shows Him what He does (John 5:20)**

Verse 20 records,

***<sup>20</sup>“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”***

The sentence begins with the conjunction, “for.” After John declared that the Son does everything that He sees the Father do, here we read the explanation of how it is that the Son can do this. John stated that the

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<sup>10</sup> Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 250f.

Father shows His Son “all things” that He Himself is doing. Here we set before us an important aspect of biblical love in a relationship—full and intimate communication. The Father loves His Son and therefore communicates to His Son, showing Him all things.

Here also we see the love of the Father and the Son manifested in different ways. Whereas the love of the Son toward the Father is shown in His obedience to His Father in all things, the love of the Father to His Son is disclosing to His Son all things that He was doing. This is quite an important matter, the knowledge of God’s will, of His purposes in history and how He is accomplishing that will, brings us into a deeper, more significant understanding of our relationship with God, the Blessed Holy Trinity. Moreover, we are instructed what it is to love and how to love through the example and illustration of the love between God the Father and God the Son. As **D. A. Carson** wrote:

If the Father out of love for His Son shows Him all He does, and the Son in consequence and out of love for His Father obeys Him perfectly and does whatever the Father does, such that people observe the Son and wonder at what He does, then two important truths follow: (1) The Son by His obedience to His Father is acting in such a way that He is *revealing* the Father, doing the Father’s deeds, performing the Father’s will. The Son is ‘exegeting’ or ‘narrating’ the Father. (2) This marvelous disclosure of the nature and character of God utterly depends, in the first instance, not on God’s love of us, but on the love of the Father for the Son and on the love of the Son for the Father. The same theme is developed in chapters 14–17: the achievement of the divine self-disclosure in Jesus, climaxed at the cross, was supremely the outflow of the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son within the Godhead.<sup>11</sup>

Or put in a different way, the relationship between God the Father and God the Son informs us and instructs us on not only how to relate to Him, but also how we are to relate to one another. This is what our confession essentially states, as we read earlier, we will now read again but give emphasis on this present idea:

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but *one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.* (Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, Art. 2, Par. 3)

The relationship between God the Father and God His Son (and also the Holy Spirit), informs us and illustrates for us what should be true of our human relationships with one another.

### **3. The Son imparts life just as does the Father (John 5:21)**

Again, **verse 21** begins with the explanatory conjunction, “For”: *“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”* This is a further explanation of all that is stated in verses 19 and 20. The best way in which the Son does all that the Father shows Him is in that just as the Father raises the dead, so the Son also gives life, and that life the Son gives is to anyone He wills to give life.

In the Old Testament the ability to give life to the dead was understood to be God’s prerogative alone. For example, the disease of leprosy was viewed as the same as being dead. When the king of Syria sent his general, Naaman, with a letter to the king of Israel, in order for Naaman to be healed of leprosy, the response of the king was as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, “*Am I God, to kill and make alive*, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.” (2 Kings 5:7)

Here Jesus not only claims to have the ability to give life to the dead, but that He has the authority to do so *as He wills* to give it. This authority to raise the dead will be manifest on the Last Day when Jesus returns to judge the world. He will cause all to be raised from the dead. He will then judge the dead. He will grant everlasting life to His people. He will consign all others to everlasting hell.<sup>12</sup>

But we will see next week that this authority is manifest in this age in imparting spiritual life to the spiritually dead. Jesus Christ grants both spiritual life—a spiritual resurrection of those dead in sins—and He grants physical life—a physical resurrection of those dead in their graves. Every time a soul comes to salvation, it is because the Son of God willed to give life to that one. And at the end of the age every one that comes forth from the grave unto eternal life, will have done so due to the will and work of Jesus Christ who raises the dead. This is not to say that the Son acts independently of the Father, rather, “His choices are so completely at one with the Father that it is no less true to say the crucial decisions are His.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. The Father has entrusted the judgment of mankind to His Son (John 5:22)**

We next read verse 22:

**“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,<sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.”**

Not only has the Father trusted His Son with giving life, both spiritual and physical, both temporal and eternal life, but the Father has also given His Son *the authority to judge the world*. On the Last Day when all the world is brought before His throne to be judged according to their works, King Jesus will be the great Judge before whom all will stand.

Even though verse 22 is in parallel with verse 21, in that the Son is declared to have authority, there is a difference. In verse 21 just as the Father gives life, so does the Son. But in Verse 22 we read that the Father “judges no one”; rather, all judgment is entrusted to the Son by the Father. God has appointed His Son to be the Judge of all the world. God did so, “in order that those two persons who are equal in *essence* (5:17, 18) and in *works* (5:19-22) may be also equal in *honor*.”<sup>14</sup> ***Nothing could bring honor to Jesus Christ more than the Father designating Him to be the Judge of all humanity on the Last Day.*** We read of the reaction of all the world on that great day:

**Matthew 25:31-32.** “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

**Revelation 6:12-17.** “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. <sup>13</sup>And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. <sup>14</sup>Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. <sup>15</sup>And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup>and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup>For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

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<sup>12</sup> Later in John’s Gospel, we will read of Jesus’ seventh and final sign, when He raises Lazarus from the dead. This event is a foreshadowing of the future resurrection of the dead which Jesus will accomplish.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Hendriksen, p. 199.

Here we see that it is the will of God that honor is given to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This honor that we render is to be equal to the honor we render unto God the Father.

### **5. The Father is honored by those who honor His Son (John 5:23b)**

This last statement is a summary as well as a declaration in climax to the entire episode. The whole stress of this present passage is on the unity of the Father and the Son. *“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”* The only way that God has ordained that He could be honored by a human being is through honoring the Son that the Father has sent to be the Savior and the Judge of the world.

## **II. Applying this Word of God to us**

1. God is always “at work” in maintaining this world even as He governs the course of all events. God’s providence, as we stated above, should be a great cause of comfort and joy for the Christian. We are not living in a world that is characterized by chaos and meaningless. God has created this world and all that is in it for a purpose, and that His to glorify God and for His people to enjoy Him forever.

2. We should not think that God is not involved in the daily events of the world in which we live. The world at times appears to be a chaotic, meaningless morass of evil mixed, and yet thankfully there are times and causes for joy and happiness. And yes, there are times when God seems to intervene in special and remarkable ways, but we should view all of the ordinary events that fall out in our lives daily as the working of providence.

2. We have a sympathetic High Priestly King who rules over history on behalf of God the Father for the benefit and eternal well-being of His people. Jesus Christ is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is both King and Priest. He not only rules over all within creation, He upholds all of his people through His intercessory ministry and governing authority.

3. Let us see and give regard to the glory that is Jesus Christ, seeking to exalt Him by presenting Him according to truth and living in accordance to His Laws. We do honor God the father most when we honor His Son best.

4. We do not honor our Lord Jesus or His Father by our murmuring and complaining of His providential work in our lives. Ever complaining about other people or about things that occur to us is murmuring against the Lord who has revealed to us that He is ordering our lives ultimately for our good and His glory. Complaining, bitterness, and angry outbursts do not honor the Lord. Every complaint against a providential event is a defiance and resistance to the Lord who orders all things.

5. We are to have patience in knowing that the Lord Jesus is going to execute judgment according to righteousness when He returns on the Last day. We may be patient in waiting until then for justice to be administered in those matters in which we encounter injustice in this life.

6. Let us be mindful that each of us will one day stand before King Jesus and be judged according to the deeds done by us in this life. We will be assessed on whether or not we have sought God’s forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ alone, even as we seek to show forth our faith in acts of love and righteousness.

7. But as Christians, let us not be afraid of that Day that is coming when Jesus Christ will call us before His judgment seat. He is able and will most certainly present His people before Him as blameless, with no debt

to God's justice owed, for He our Judge is also our Savior who paid our debt to God's justice for having transgressed His law. "There is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1)

8. Let us tell forth the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, that He is God the Father's Beloved and eternal Son, in whom the father has entrusted all authority in heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is Lord, and so let us believe on Him, submit unto Him, and follow Him.

9. Even as we witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are to pray that the Lord impart life to whom we bear witness, for they will never come to know God savingly through Jesus Christ unless He imparts spiritual life to that spiritually dead person. Only Jesus Christ can raise the spiritually dead person to spiritual life, knowing Him and living before Him.

10. Let us rejoice in God having revealed to us the glory of His Son, that we have a rich, glorious, and bliss-filled eternity before us. Let us be at peace with Him and with one another in this knowledge and in light of His promises to us.

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And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,  
so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.  
To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time,  
apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb. 9:27f)

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