

Commentary on the Gospel of John Bible Study Notes and Comments

by David E. Pratte



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*Commentary on the Gospel of John:
Bible Study Notes and Comments*

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**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

Comments on the Book of John

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Notes to the reader: To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. You can find study questions to accompany these notes at www.gospelway.com/classbooks. The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

Introduction to the Gospel of John

Author

The book was written by the apostle John, who was the brother of James and the son of Zebedee. John is nowhere named in the book; but instead of arguing against his authorship, this argues for it.

In 21:24 and elsewhere, the author refers to himself as simply “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” But he nowhere names himself in the book. And though the apostle John is prominently mentioned in the other gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, he is nowhere named in this record. Therefore, John would fit the disciple who wrote the book.

Further, this disciple can be identified as an apostle by studying the events at which he was present and comparing them to who was present at those events as recorded in the other accounts. Likewise, the disciple occupied the position that would fit John’s position according to other accounts.

Moreover, the author was a personal eyewitness of Jesus’ life and miracles. In particular, he was present at Jesus’ appearances to His apostles, at the last supper, etc. (13:23; 19:35; 21:24,25; 20:30,31). Hence, he was an apostle. But other apostles are named and identified in ways that distinguish them from “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” As mentioned above, however, nothing names John or in any way distinguishes him from the author.

Further, there are many similarities between this book and 1,2, & 3 John (note especially 1 John 1:1ff).

Finally, early church writers and historians have universally recognized John as the author of this account (see Johnson’s commentary).

All this evidence leads to the conclusion that the apostle John is that disciple who is the inspired author of the book.

(For additional specifics, see the introductions to commentaries such as B.W. Johnson, Daniel King, and others.)

Date

No information is given in the book that allows it to be definitely dated. It is most likely the last inspired written account of Jesus’ life, yet we cannot with certainty determine the exact date of writing. Johnson says simply between 75 and 90 AD.

Theme

The book is an inspired record of the life of Jesus, written by a personal first-hand eyewitness, who is able to personally testify regarding most of the events he describes.

The major purpose of his record is to provide evidence that Jesus is the Christ in whom we must believe to be saved (see 20:30,31; 21:24,25). He repeatedly cites evidence to support this claim. He often uses words such as “witness,” “testimony,” and related words.

He achieves his purpose by emphasizing Jesus’ miracles, including many events or insights into events which are not recorded in the other accounts. As a result, John gives a unique record of Jesus’ life, of inestimable value in establishing the gospel claims regarding who Jesus is.

A brief summary of facts about the author

Knowing John’s life helps us understand his record, and especially shows us how thoroughly qualified he was to speak as an eyewitness about Jesus’ life.

* He was a son of Zebedee and brother of James — Matt. 4:21; Acts 12:1,2.

* He was originally a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee — Mark 1:19,20.

* Some believe he was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist, whom John pointed to Jesus (John 1:35-39).

* Called by Jesus to become a fisher of men, he was continually with Jesus and so witnessed most events in Jesus’ life — Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11.

* He was named by Jesus to be an apostle — Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-19.

* He was with Peter and James to witness several events that other apostles did not: the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33); and the preparation for the Passover (Luke 22:8).

* Events in his life indicate he was rather emotional and impetuous — Luke 9:49,54; Mark 9:38.

* Some believe his mother was Salome, who was a sister to Jesus’ mother Mary. If so, John and Jesus were cousins (cf. Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40).

* His mother requested a special position for James and John — Mark 10:35.

* He was beloved by the Lord, and asked who would betray Him — John 13:25.

* He fled when Jesus was arrested, but went to His trial — Matt. 26:56; John 18:16.

- * He cared for Jesus' mother after Jesus' died — John 19:26.
 - * He visited the empty tomb after the resurrection — John 20:2,3.
 - * He recognized Jesus at the Sea of Galilee — John 21:1-7,20-24.
 - * With Peter, he healed the lame man at the temple gate — Acts 3.
- As a result, he was arrested and imprisoned, but released — Acts 4.
- * He was recognized by Paul to be a pillar of the church in Jerusalem — Gal. 2:9.
 - * He accompanied Peter to lay hands on the Samaritans to give them the Holy Spirit — Acts 8:14ff.
 - * He wrote the books of and 1,2,3 John and Revelation (Rev. 1:1,4,9). He was a prisoner on Patmos when he wrote Revelation.

Witnesses to Jesus in the book of John

Uninspired witnesses

- Andrew - 1:41
- Philip - 1:45
- Nathanael - 1:49
- Nicodemus - 3:2
- Samaritans - 4:42
- Multitudes - 6:14; 10:41;
- Pharisees - 9:16-34
- The man healed of blindness - 9:17-38
- Martha - 11:27
- Thomas - 20:28

Prophets (including Old Testament prophecies)

- John the Baptist - 1:6-8,14,15,19-36; 3:22-30; 5:31-33; 10:40,41;
- Acts 19:4,5
- John the apostle - 1:14; 20:30,31

Fulfilled prophecy

- Moses - 5:45-47
- Isaiah - 12:38-41
- David - 18:23,24,36,37
- Jesus Himself - 13:18,19,21-27,38

Jesus Himself

- 3:13-16; 4:25,26; 5:18-47; 8:13-18; 9:35-37; 10:24,25; 14:6;
- 18:36,37;

Miracles

- General - 2:23; 5:36
- Water to wine - 2:1-11
- Healing of the nobleman's son - 4:46-54
- Healing of the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda - 5:1-15
- Feeding of the 5000 - 6:1-14
- Walking on the water - 6:15-21

Healing of the blind man – chap. 9

Raising of Lazarus – chap. 11; 12:9-11,17-19

The multitudes acknowledge the miracles – 7:31; 9:16; 10:21;
11:37; 12:17-19;

Enemies acknowledge the miracles – 11:47

The resurrection

2:18-22; chap. 20, 21

Commentaries consulted

B.W. Johnson; Daniel H. King, Sr.;

Jesus' Public Ministry

Chap. 1-12

John 1

1:1-18 - John's Introduction

John begins by identifying his claims regarding who Jesus is. The introduction of John's gospel immediately introduces the major themes that John intends to discuss. Then he spends the rest of the book proving and demonstrating these themes from the life and teaching of Jesus.

Major doctrines or truths regarding Jesus stated in John 1:1-18:

1. Jesus is eternal and uncreated, existing before the world began (1:1-3).
2. Jesus possesses Deity (absolute authority and rulership over created things — 1:1).
3. Jesus is a separate Being from the Father (1:1,2,18).
4. Jesus is the Creator – the active force through Whom all things were made (1:3,10).
5. Jesus is the source of truth and understanding of God's will (1:4,5,14,17,18).
6. Jesus is the source of life by which men have a relationship with God and hope of eternal life (1:4).
7. Jesus became incarnate in the flesh as a man (1:14,9,10)
8. Jesus was rejected by men (1:10,11).
9. Jesus is the One who can give people power to become children of God (1:12).

1:1,2 – The Word was in the beginning with God and was God

The "Word" refers to Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, as shown by vv 14,17.

"In the beginning" must refer to the beginning of creation, as in Genesis 1:1. That this is the meaning is confirmed in v3 showing that Jesus is the Creator. So Jesus existed from eternity with the Father.

Note that the use of “was” shows that Jesus already was in existence when the Creation occurred.

This simultaneously proves both that Jesus possesses Deity and He is a separate and distinct living Being from the Father.

The Word was “with God” in that Jesus was present in the beginning with the Father (see v3; Cf. 1 John 1:2) – so, He is a separate individual living Being from the Father. But He also “was God” in that He Himself possessed Deity.

To say there is one God is not necessarily to say there is only one individual Being that possesses Deity. Jesus affirmed that He and His Father are “one” as all believers are to be one (John 17:20,21) – not one individual, but one in purpose, goal, doctrine, etc.

The term “god” refers to that which possesses all the characteristics of Deity and therefore deserves to be worshipped and honored as God. The true God of the Bible is one God, but consists of three separate and distinct individual Beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They all possess unlimited power over the created things, all are eternal and unlimited in wisdom, goodness, love, etc. There may be some differences among them as regards their relationship to one another, but as regards their relationship to us the creatures, they are all the same. There is no difference to us whether it is the Father who tells us a matter, or the Son, or the Spirit.

These three are “one” in contrast to the heathen deities that possessed different characteristics, different wills, different degrees and areas of power, and often even warred and contradicted one another.

Some claim Jesus is “a god,” but not God like the Father is God.

Some, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, argue that the Greek “was God” has no definite article before “God,” whereas there is a definite article in “with God.” So, it is claimed that Jesus is god is a lesser sense, different from the Father. Hence, the “New World Translation” says, “the word was a god.” However,

(1) **All major standard translations say, “the Word was God.”** None say “a god.” So, they contradict the NWT. (See NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NIV, etc.)

(2) **If Jesus is “god” in a lesser sense than the Father, then we would have *two* different true gods!** Clearly, Jesus is not a false god; so, He is true God. But if He is “god” in a different sense than the Father, that would violate the passages saying there is one true God!

(3) **Many Scriptures use “God” (Gk. θεος) without an article to refer to the true God.** See Matthew 5:9; 6:24; Luke 1:35,78; John 1:6,12,13,18; Romans 17:17; and many others.

(4) **Many Scriptures use “God” both with and without an article in the same context, yet both uses clearly refer to the true God.** See Matthew 4:3,4; 12:28; Luke 20:37,38; John 3:2; 13:3; Acts 5:29,30; Romans 1:7,8,17-19; 2:16,17; 3:5,22,23; 4:2,3; etc.

(5) **The context of John 1:1-3 shows that Jesus is eternal and created all things.** (See our later discussion on the character and works of Jesus). To call Him “God” in such a context must surely mean He is God in the same exalted sense as the Father.

(6) **We will soon see other passages referring to Jesus as “God” using the definite article.** If the NWT distinction is valid, then these passages must prove conclusively that Jesus is God in the same sense as the Father.

So, John 1:1 refers to both Jesus and the Father as “God” in a context that affirms the eternal existence of Jesus and that He is the Creator of all (v1-3). This would be blasphemy if He does not possess Deity as the Father does.

[Marshall, Vine, Vincent, Lenski, Robertson, and other Greek scholars contend that the article is absent from “was God” in John 1:1, not to imply that Jesus was a “lesser god,” but simply to identify “God” as the predicate nominative despite the fact it precedes the verb for emphasis (Colwell’s Rule). If it had the definite article, that would imply that “the Word” and the Father are the same person. In any case, the Scriptures listed above clearly show that the lack of the article does not prove Jesus is God in a lesser sense than the Father.]

Other passages affirming Jesus’ Deity

Colossians 2:9

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (NKJV, KJV, ASV). Or: “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB, RSV, NIV is similar).

Hebrews 1:3

Jesus was “the express image of His [the Father’s] person” (NKJV, KJV) or “the very image of his substance” (ASV), “the exact representation of His nature” (NASB), “the exact representation of his being” (NIV). The context describes Jesus as the Creator, far above the angels so that He deserves to be worshipped. But only God is properly worshipped, hence Jesus is God in the fullest sense of the word.

God possesses certain characteristics that are so unique that no one but God can possess them (eternal, all-powerful, etc.). If no one but God possesses these, yet Jesus is the exact reproduction of the essence of God’s nature, then He must possess these qualities. But if Jesus possesses all qualities that are unique to God, He must be God: He must possess Deity.

Philippians 2:6-8

Before coming to earth, Jesus existed in the form of God (v6). This is so translated in KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, and RSV. NIV says: “being in very nature God.” This must mean that Jesus truly possessed Deity before He came to earth.

V7 uses the same word “form” to say that He took the form (μορφή) of a servant. Was Jesus really a servant on earth? Of course He was (Matthew 20:28; John 13:1-6; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Acts 4:27,30 ASV). It follows that, before He came to earth, He really possessed the nature of God.

John 20:28,29

After he saw proof of Jesus’ resurrection, Thomas addressed Jesus as “my Lord and my God” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB, NIV). Clearly, Thomas is here calling Jesus “God.” Consider:

The word for God is θεος *with the definite article*. According to their argument on John 1:1, even Jehovah’s Witnesses must admit that this means the one **true** God, in the same sense as the Father.

If Jesus did not possess Deity, Thomas’ statement would have been blasphemy, and Jesus should have rebuked Him. Instead, Jesus praised Thomas and pronounced a blessing on everyone who believes the same (v29)!

Hebrews 1:8

The Father said to Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB, NIV). This is a quotation from Psalm 45:6,7, which is translated exactly the same (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV).

Note that God the Father Himself is here addressing Jesus as “God” (cf. vv 1-9).

Further “God” here has the definite article so even Witnesses must admit it refers to the one True God.

Psalms 102:24

“I said, O my God, Do not take me away...” Hebrews 1:10-12 directly quotes Psalm 102:25-27 and says that it was spoken “to the Son” (v8). The context of Psalm 102:24 shows it is clearly addressed to the same person addressed in vv 25-27.

Hence, in v24 Jesus is addressed as “O my God.”

Isaiah 9:6

Jesus’ name would be called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God...” This is clearly a prophecy of the Son, as seen in the beginning of the verse. Hence, Jesus is called “Mighty God.”

John 1:1 states a truth repeated throughout the New Testament: Jesus possesses Deity and all the characteristics of Deity as fully as does the Father. And He possessed such Deity from eternity.

Other passages affirming Jesus is a separate individual from the Father

A father and his son must be separate individuals

Consider the following references:

Matthew 3:17 — This is **My** beloved **Son**.

Matthew 16:16,17 — **You** are ... the **Son of the living God ...**

My Father in heaven revealed this.

Matthew 17:5 — This is **My** beloved **Son** (spoken by God the **Father** — 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

John 3:16 — **God** gave **His** only-begotten **Son**.

John 5:17 — **My Father** has been working, and **I** work.

Hebrews 1:5 — I will be to **Him** a **Father** and **He** shall be to **Me** a **Son**.

1 John 1:3 — Have fellowship with the **Father** and with **His Son Jesus Christ**

2 John 3 — Grace from God the **Father** and from **Jesus Christ the Son of the Father**

2 John 9 — Abide in the teaching and have **both the Father and the Son**

A father and his son are necessarily two separate and distinct individuals. A single individual can be both a father and a son at the same time — a father to one person and a son to another person. But no one can be the same person as **his own** son, and no person can be the same individual as **his own** father!

The Father prepared a body for the Son — Hebrews 10:5

When Jesus came into the world, He said, “a **body You** have prepared for **Me**.” “You” is God the Father (v7). “Me” is Jesus the Son (v10). The “body” is the body in which Jesus came into the world (vv 5,10).

Again, “you” and “me” necessarily refer to a plurality of individuals. Jesus was the “me,” not the “you” (the Father).

And Jesus is not just the “body.” The body was **prepared** for the “Me” (Jesus). Here are two separate and distinct spirit beings discussing the body in which Jesus came to earth.

Judgment given by the Father to the Son — John 5:22

The **Father** does not judge any man, but has given all judgment to the **Son**. If the Father and Son are the same individual, then when Jesus judges people, the Father **is** judging them. But the Son judges, and the Father does not judge. Therefore, they must be separate individuals.

Jesus prayed to the Father — John 17:1-5 (Matthew 26:39; John 11:41)

Jesus lifted His eyes to Heaven and prayed to the Father (v1). He said, “I have glorified **You** ... **I** have finished the work **You** have given **Me** to do” (v4). **I** and **you** make plural individuals. But if the Father and Son are the same individual, then Jesus prayed to Himself!

Jesus was WITH the Father before the world began — John 17:5,24

He (Jesus) said “**Father**, glorify **Me** together with **Yourself** with the glory which **I** had **with You before the world was**” (17:5). Further, the **Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world** (17:24).

You and **Me** implies separate individuals. The Father was one “**self**,” but Jesus was **with Him**. All this was before there ever was any fleshly body.

The Son is on the Father’s right hand — Ephesians 1:17,20

The **Father** raised **Jesus** from the dead and made Him sit at **His right hand**. Clearly, this describes a relationship between two separate individuals. If Jesus and the Father are the same individual, then Jesus is sitting at His own right hand! (See also Acts 2:33; 7:55,56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22.)

Jesus and the Father had independent wills — Matthew 26:39

Jesus prayed, “**Not as I will but as you will.**” **My will and your will** make two distinct minds each capable of making its own decisions. The Father’s will and the Son’s will agree and are united, but each has individual power to choose and to will. Each has His own mind and intelligence separate from the other.

(See also John 6:38-40; 8:28,42; 5:30; 7:16; 12:49; 14:10,24.)

The Father and the Son make two witnesses — John 8:13,16-18,29

Jews accused Jesus of testifying of **Himself** (v13). Jesus said the law required **two** witnesses (v17; cf. Deut. 19:15). He claimed He was **not alone** because “**I am with the Father** who sent me” (v16). Further, **I am One** that bears witness of **Myself**, and the **Father** bears witness of **Me** (v18). That fulfills the requirements for **two** witnesses (v17). So, **He** who sent me is **with Me**; **He** has not left **Me alone** (v29).

Again, **I and My Father** make a plurality of individuals. If Jesus and the Father were the same individual, then Jesus would be **alone** and would have only **one** witness. But Jesus said He was **not alone** and He and His Father fulfilled the requirement of **two** witnesses.

This can only be true if they constitute two separate and distinct individuals.

Jesus and His Father are “WE” — John 14:23; 17:20-23

Jesus (“me”) and “my Father” love those who obey. “**We**” will come and dwell with them (14:23). The Father and Son are an “**Us**” and a “**We**” (17:21,22). How can “we” and “us” be one individual?

Jesus had a spirit separate & distinct from that of His Father — Matthew 27:46,50; Luke 23:46

When Jesus was on the cross, the Father *forsook* Him (Matt. 27:46). Clearly, the Father’s spirit was no longer with Jesus. Yet Jesus continued to live awhile, having *His own spirit*, which then departed when He died (v50). When He died, He commended *His spirit* into *His Father’s* hands (Luke 23:46). Did Jesus commend His own Spirit into the hands of His own Spirit, and then give up His spirit? No, Jesus had His own Spirit separate from His Father’s spirit.

The fact a person has his own spirit, separate from the spirit of other beings, is what makes him a separate individual. But Jesus had his own spirit separate from the Father’s spirit, therefore He must have been a separate and distinct individual from His Father.

Jesus & His Father are one as His disciples are one — John 17:20-23

Again, the Father and Son are described as *You* and *Me, I* and *You*, clearly identifying separate individuals. They are also called *we* (v22) — *plural* individuals.

Further, Jesus and His Father are one *even as* His disciples should be one. How should disciples be “one”? Do we all become *one and the same individual* — one living being? No, we remain separate individuals, but we are one in purpose, faith, goals, character, doctrine, practice, etc. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-20, 25-27; Eph. 4:1-4; etc.)

If the Father and Son are one individual, then this passage says all His disciples must become one individual — an impossibility! But if we are not all one individual, but the Father and Son are one *even as* we are one, then the Father and Son cannot be one individual.

All three Beings were present at Jesus’ baptism — Luke 3:21,22

Jesus was on earth, having been baptized, and He was praying. The *Holy Spirit* descended in a bodily form like a dove (He is not a dove but took a bodily form *like* a dove). A voice from heaven said, “*You are My beloved Son.*”

The voice was clearly the Heavenly Father. So, in this story all 3 are present and are presented as being 3 separate individuals.

Baptism in the name of the three — Matthew 28:19

The apostles were commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is clear from our studies that the Father and Son are two separate individuals. Surely then the “Holy Spirit” must also be a living individual separate from the other two.

John 1:1 states a truth also repeated throughout the New Testament: He and His Father are two separate and distinct individual living spirit Beings, even though both possess Deity.

For further discussion of the Deity of Jesus and the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

1:3 - Jesus is the Creator

Since Jesus existed in the beginning (vv 1,2), He is before everything that was created. In fact, Jesus created everything that was created, without exception. Nothing was made without Him (cf. v10; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

The passage does not affirm that Jesus was the only Being involved in the creation. Rather, it says all things were made “through Him.” He was the active force who actually brought all created things into existence. But He was also acting on behalf of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 1:2,3; Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Genesis 1:2). The fact that all three Beings of the Godhead were present at the creation is what explains the use of plural pronouns for God in Genesis 1:26,27.

It follows necessarily that Jesus Himself is eternal.

He cannot be a created being, as Jehovah’s Witnesses argue. He created everything that was created. This necessarily means that He Himself was not created or else He created Himself. But He could not have created Himself. Therefore, He must be eternal (cf. Colossians 1:17).

This also affirms His Deity, for if He is the eternal Creator, then He must be God. He is not classed with the created things, but stands apart from us being classed with the Father and the Spirit.

Any view that presents Jesus as less than the active Creator of all Creation or less than an eternal Being in the Godhead is a view that contradicts Scripture and denies the exalted truth regarding the nature of Jesus.

1:4 - Jesus inherently possesses the power of life

Jesus had life in Himself in that He was alive from eternity, from the beginning (vv 1,2). This enabled Him, as the Creator, to give life to all living things including man. It also enabled Him to arise from the dead and to give men eternal life. Being the source of life physically

(v3), demonstrates that He is also the source of life spiritually in the new birth (v12; 1 John 5:11,12; John 17:3).

Jesus as the source of life is another of the major themes of the record of John. He is the way, the truth, and the life. The only way men can have spiritual life in relationship with the Father is through Jesus (John 14:6). Therefore, He is the one who can give men truly abundant life (John 10:10). Because He has life in Himself, men must go to Him to have life (John 5:26,40). He has the words of eternal life; His words are spirit and life (John 6:63,68).

John will return to this theme and enlarge on it through the book.

Jesus is the source of spiritual light.

John then connects the life in Jesus to the light that He gives to men. Jesus created both physical life and light on earth. He made the sun to rule the light (Gen. 1). Physical light is essential to life. There had to be light in order for life to exist and continue.

But in John's statement, Jesus as the life is also the source of light. Only the all-powerful living God could create light. But John uses Jesus as the source of life to introduce Him as also the source of spiritual light. Jesus as the source of light is another major theme of John (cf. John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

The connection between life and light comes through the word, the revelation of truth through the written word. As "the Word," Jesus reveals God's will to man (v18), and authoritatively declares God's commands. He has the words of eternal life; His words are spirit and life (John 6:63,68). This revelation is the source of man's enlightenment (Psa. 119:105; Matt. 28:18; Proverbs 3:18; 4:20,22).

The truth of Jesus' message gives light in that it reveals the true meaning and purpose of life, showing us how to live. The God who gave us life had a purpose for our lives. To know that purpose, we need light – understanding of what He wants us to do. The same Creator Jesus who gave us the life at creation also gave us the light of His word to show us how to live life.

John will also return frequently to the theme of Jesus and His word as the source of spiritual light.

1:5 - Light is given to dispel darkness

Light and darkness are opposites. Or more specifically, darkness is the absence of light. Darkness exists where light does not exist, but the coming of light eliminates darkness. Just as Jesus is the source of light, He is the One who dispels darkness.

As on v4, light represents truth and the proper understanding of the meaning of life and how to please God to receive eternal life. So, darkness represents the ignorance of men who do not understand the purpose of life and how to please God. So, darkness comes to represent evil and wickedness that leads to eternal death instead of eternal life.

Just as light dispels darkness, so the truth of Jesus can eliminate wickedness from the lives of men and lead them to eternal life instead of eternal punishment (see again the other passages listed under v4).

Yet, the light sent from God was not comprehended by the darkness.

When this light from God shone into the darkness, it was not comprehended (see also notes on vv 9,10). This would appear to state that the people in darkness did not accept or understand the light that God had sent them. Physical darkness has no power to resist light. But, in the case of men, darkness is sometimes a matter of choice – they may reject the light, because they don't want to live by it (John 3:19ff).

This is the first of several statements from John showing that, though Jesus is so incredibly great, yet people did not appreciate Him for what He is. They rejected Him. I believe this refers primarily to His life on earth and subsequent crucifixion, though of course it is still true for many people today. Though He was the great Creator and source of life, when He came to live on earth the world did not know Him (v10). They did not receive Him (v11).

Just because light is present does not mean men will benefit from it. Some may close their eyes and stay in darkness. Some prefer to avoid the light and go where darkness reigns (3:19ff). This is what men did with Jesus' revelation (Matt. 13:13ff).

King points out that the word for "comprehend" does not necessarily mean to understand. It can mean to overcome. So darkness cannot successfully resist and defeat light. It may have seemed at times, while Jesus was on earth and especially when He died, that the darkness would defeat the light; yet in the end the light of Jesus' truth prevailed over darkness. This, of course, is a true fact. But John returns to discussing light in vv 9-11 and shows that men rejected Jesus. This leads me to lean toward the explanation I have given above. Both ideas, of course, are true, and perhaps both of them fit the passage.

1:6-8 - John the Baptist as a witness for Christ

Here the apostle John cites his first witness to give testimony to the truth of John's proposition regarding who Jesus is. John the Baptist was sent from God to be a witness to the light. He himself was not the light, but he was a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe.

Note the emphasis, especially in the gospel of John but also throughout the New Testament, on the concept of testifying or giving evidence (witness). God does not expect men to just accept Jesus and His message as being true without evidence. John is writing to provide us evidence, and he begins the book making this point. We will see the concept of evidence again and again throughout the book.

The writer affirms that John the Baptist was sent from God. He was a prophet: a spokesman and representative of God. He did not speak on his own initiative or from his own opinions. He was guided by God. This is exactly what the New Testament repeatedly affirms regarding John. See on Matthew 3:1-22 and other passages. Note especially that these references repeatedly affirm that John's work was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5 of one who would be sent to prepare the way for God. So John was sent by God to do a special work. See also notes on John 1:19-34. If John was sent from God, then of course his message should be taken seriously as Divine revelation.

Not the light, but a witness to the light

Not only was John sent from God, but he was specifically sent to prepare the way for the Christ. This means that his work as a witness would be especially important. He came for the express purpose of preparing the people so they could believe on Jesus when he came. If anyone should recognize the Christ and be able to accurately point them to the Christ, it should be John. Many of Jesus' first disciples were people who had first been followers of John (see examples later in this chapter).

However, although John was a witness to the light, he was not himself that light. The light refers back to vv 4,5. Jesus came to give the light of truth and understanding to men. John was not himself the Christ, but he was a witness to point men to the Christ.

In vv 20 John expressly denied that he was the Christ. Apparently, there were some then – and there still are some today – who hold too highly exalted a view of John (cf. Luke 3:15). Yes, he was a prophet who had the special job of pointing the way to Christ. This work should be appreciated. But he should not be exalted to a position anywhere near that of Christ. The Christ was not just a prophet but the one unique Son of God and Savior of the world – Matthew 16:13-18. He was the Creator, God in the flesh - see on John 1:1-3. Neither John nor any man can even approximate Jesus' position. John should neither be over-exalted nor under-appreciated.

The implication of the verse is that the Light is someone, not just an inanimate thing. Whoever it was, it was not John but, by implication, it was someone else.

1:9,10 - The light was not recognized

Though John was not the true source of light, yet the light did exist and did come into the world. It made light available to every man. However, though the light came into the world and had in fact made the world, yet the world did not know Him (see on vv 3-5).

Note that, if men are ignorant, it is ultimately man's fault. Physical darkness has no choice but to give way to the light. But men in dark-

ness do have a choice whether or not they will recognize and accept spiritual light. The problem is not that truth was unrevealed or cannot be understood. The light **did shine**. The problem was that men chose not to accept it (cf. John 3:19-21).

There is no excuse for people who do not know truth and do not recognize Jesus. He is the Creator, the One who made us all, and yet men don't recognize or honor Him! Note the great irony that the Creator of the world was not recognized by His own creation (cf. Romans 1:20). Imagine a created work that becomes so egotistical that it somehow denies and even rejects its own maker. That is how the world treated Jesus.

John writes this having the benefit of the historical knowledge that Jesus eventually was killed. Since people ended up rejecting Him, John sets out to prove that He really was who He claimed to be and people therefore should not reject Him.

1:11,12 - Even His own did not receive Him

Not only did the world in general not recognize Jesus, though it had been made by Him, yet even His own people did not recognize and receive Him. This includes especially the fact that the Jews killed Jesus (though even more may be implied).

Beginning with Abraham and following through his descendants and the prophets, the Messiah had been promised again and again. He was the promised blessing on all nations to come through Abraham's seed. He was the great Christ promised to come as David's descendant. The Jewish people were all looking for Him. But when He came, they did not recognize Him, but rejected and killed Him. This fact had been predicted in many Old Testament prophecies and was the point of many of Jesus' own parables (cf. Luke 24:46).

The irony increases! The world was made by Jesus, yet the world rejected its own Creator. And the special people of God who, of all people, ought to have recognized the Christ, yet killed Him! The builders rejected the chief cornerstone (1 Peter 2:7).

The importance of receiving Jesus

Though many did not receive Him, however, some did receive Him by believing in Him. To these He gave a great blessing. He gave them the right to become children of God. This is another way of saying they could be spiritually born again (see notes on 3:3ff for a deeper discussion of being born again). Jesus has power to give people a new birth because life is in Him (v4). See notes below on v13 for a continuation of this idea.

What an incredible blessing! We can be made children of God by being born again into His spiritual family, which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15). No founder of any other religious system can make good on such a claim. Only Jesus can make children of God (John

14:6). Without Him, every man is powerless to enter God's favor. But we must believe in Him. It follows that those who do not believe in Jesus as the one true Savior cannot be born again – they do not have power to become children of God, but will die in their sins (John 8:24; Mark 16:16).

For other passages about the new birth, see: John 3:1-7; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Romans 6:3,5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26,27. For other passages about the need for believing in Jesus, see: Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16.

However, contrary to popular belief, the verse does not say that a person automatically and immediately becomes a child of God at the point of faith or simply because he believes. Other passages show that, in order to be born again as a child of God, one must also obey God. In particular, one must be baptized. For passages about the importance of obedience, see: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6. For passages about the need for baptism, see: Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21. In particular, for passages that tie the new birth to obedience or to baptism, see 1 Pet. 1:22-25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3-7; Gal. 3:26,27; see notes on John 3:3-7.

What this passage actually says is that believing gives one the **right to become** a child of God. He is not yet a child of God, but he has the right to become one if he exercises his right. Buying a ticket to an event gives you the **right** to attend, but it does not by itself alone automatically put you at the event and make you a spectator. There are other additional things you must do after buying a ticket.

I once bought a ticket to a college football game, but when the day came the weather was so terrible I chose not to go. Likewise, believing in Jesus gives one the right to become a child of God, but does not by itself alone automatically make one a child of God. There are other things one must do after believing, and tragically many people fail to do them.

For further discussion about salvation by faith alone vs. obedient faith and the importance of obedience and baptism, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

1:13 - Becoming a child of God requires spiritual birth

One becomes a child of God (v12) by being born into His family – born again by a new birth (see on v12 and especially on 3:3ff). This new birth is not a physical birth of flesh and blood. In particular, one is not born again just because he wills to be so, like a man has a child because

he chooses to have a relationship with a woman. Nor did man's planning design the way or make the means available whereby man can become a child of God. The plan is from God, originated in His mind and revealed by Jesus in the gospel (see 1 Pet. 1:22-25 and verses listed on v12 above). (For other passages about flesh and blood, see Matthew 16:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Ephesians 6:12; Galatians 1:16.)

In particular, one is not born again as a result of physical ancestry. That is, one is not a child of God simply because he was born into a particular family or nation. This is a major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Law of Moses put one immediately into covenant relationship with God simply because he was born a descendant of Abraham (through Jacob) and was circumcised. This did not mean one would be saved eternally, but it gave covenant relationship with God and many accompanying blessings. But the blessings of salvation and a relationship with God under the New Testament is determined by the terms of the gospel, regardless of who one's parents may be. Salvation is for Jew or Gentile without respect of persons. See Romans 1:16; 2:1-11; Acts 10:34,35; Mark 16:15,16; Galatians 3:26-29; etc.

This does not mean man has no power to choose whether or not he will receive the new birth. Other passages (such as those listed under v12) show that God has given us the power to choose to believe and obey or not do so. But the will of God designed the plan and made it available. Without this, there would have been no hope for us, and nothing we could do could make it possible.

1:14 - God in the flesh

This verse clearly identifies who "the Word" is as discussed in context. The Word was introduced in vv 1ff, but here finally we are told that this Word is "the only begotten of the Father." He is not named until v17, yet here v14 identifies Him to be Jesus. Verse 18 refers to Him as the "only begotten Son" (cf. John 3:16). This is confirmed by vv 19ff, which show that Jesus is the one John testified about.

This One became flesh and dwelt among us. Here is a clear statement of the incarnation of Christ. Though He was God from the beginning (v1), yet He took on Him the form of man and was born in the flesh (cf. Phil. 2:5ff). This explains how the "Light" came into the world (v9).

The concept of God coming to earth as a man is an incredible doctrine and in many ways beyond our comprehension. Yet it is clearly taught here and in many passages. This is the consequence of the Virgin Birth, as Jesus was born as the fleshly son of Mary (human), yet conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit – Deity uniting with man in Jesus Christ. See Luke 1:26-38, especially v35; Matthew 1:18-25.

In particular, there were apparently some (perhaps Gnostics) who denied that God ever could or over did take on the body of a man. John

here and elsewhere, especially in 1 John, clearly identifies this belief as false doctrine, even the anti-Christ. It is serious error to deny that Jesus possessed the full nature of Deity, but it is also serious error to deny that He came in the flesh as a man.

For other passages showing that Jesus truly came in a bodily form as a man see Philippians 2:5-8; 2 John 7; 1 John 4:2; Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18; 4:1; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 1:21,22; Hebrews 2:9-15. This concept is often called the Incarnation.

He dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

King points out that the word for “dwelt” actually carries the idea of “tabernacled.” So this is an allusion to the fact that God’s presence in the Old Testament dwelt in the tabernacle, where men could come and see His glory (Exodus 25:8; 2 Samuel 7:6; Exodus 16:7,10; 29:43; 40:34,35; Leviticus 9:6,23; Numbers 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6). So likewise in the New Testament, Jesus came to earth and dwelt in a physical body where men would behold His glory. Deity manifested itself so men could be overwhelmed by the evidence of His greatness.

John then affirms that he and others beheld Jesus’ glory. Here is a claim that John himself was an eyewitness. He did not just hear about Jesus’ glory as a rumor or legend handed down for many generations. But he personally examined that glory for himself. This is the strength of Bible evidence for Jesus: personal eyewitnesses testify what they saw. John will reaffirm this personal testimony several times in the book and in his other books.

Glory as of the only begotten of the Father

John 17:5 says that Jesus had glory with the Father before the world began, and that He would return to that glory after He left earth. So, the glory that Jesus showed while on earth, great as it was, did not appear to men in the full glory of Deity that He truly possessed. He often appeared simply as a man; though the greatness of His real nature sometimes showed through, such as in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5). Yet on earth he humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation so He could serve as a man (Philippians 2:5-8ff). So the glory John and others saw while Jesus was on earth is, even so, just a partial revelation of His full greatness.

“Only begotten” does not mean God created Jesus or brought Him into existence, as some claim. V3 showed Jesus Himself is eternal and created everything that was created; hence, He must be eternal (see notes on v3). The phrase could refer to Jesus’ begetting when he was made incarnate in the virgin birth. But the term primarily refers to a father-son relationship that is so close it is unique, shared by no one else (v18; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9).

John has just said that other people can be, in a sense, begotten and born as God’s children (v12). But vv 14,18 then contrast this to the

sense in which Jesus is His Son. He is the **only** begotten — a unique relationship as a son by fundamental nature of Deity. Compare this to Hebrews 11:17 where Isaac was the unique or only begotten son of Abraham because of the special promises to be fulfilled through him, yet he was not literally the only one to be begotten by Abraham. As such, Jesus can reveal the Father (v18) in a way no one else can do, and He Himself possesses glory that belongs to no one else (John 17:5; cf. Hebrews 1:3).

He was also full of grace and truth (see notes on vv 16,17).

1:15 - John the Baptist taught Jesus' preferred position

This only-begotten Son is the One John bore witness of. John said that the One who was to come after John was before John. How can He be both before and after John?

John was preparing the way for the ministry of another prophet and teacher (see notes on vv 6-8). But this One, Whose earthly ministry would follow John's, had actually existed long before John. In fact, He is eternal (vv 1-3). Because of His eternal existence and Deity, He has priority or preferred position. He has a more exalted position with far greater authority and honor.

From physical birth, John was older. But Jesus was pre-eminent, and John humbly recognized this (cf. vv 20,26f,30ff,36). This statement from John is directly applied to Jesus in v30 (cf. v36).

Despite the claims of some then and now, John at no point made any effort to seek for himself a position above or even equal to that of Jesus. The author here makes clear that John himself knew his proper position. He came to prepare the way for another, who was greater than He was. Yet the One for whom He prepared the way had preeminence because of pre-existence, as well as because of His exalted position.

1:16,17 - What we receive comes from that which filled Jesus

We have just been told that Jesus was full of grace and truth (v14). Now we are told that we humans can receive that which comes from or made up this fullness (that which filled Him). He was filled with grace, and we may partake of that grace. He was filled with truth, and we may partake of that truth — see more on v17. For other references to the fullness that filled Christ, see Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Ephesians 3:19; 4:13; 1:22,23.

In particular, we have received “grace for grace.” Grace is favor, blessing, or kindness bestowed on one who does not deserve it. Because of our sins, we do not deserve God's favor. But Jesus has provided grace upon grace — multiplied favors that we do not deserve. God has not skimmed in His blessings to us through Jesus. He has not given of His leftovers or lesser blessings. He has given us favors multiplied by and heaped upon favors.

The law through Moses contrasted to grace and truth through Jesus

The law was given through Moses at Mt. Sinai. This includes the Ten Commands and all the law. But Jesus, who is filled with grace and truth (v14), is the one who brought grace and truth to us. This is the first time Jesus is mentioned by name in the book. Clearly, He is the Word, the Light John has been describing.

Jesus brought light into the world and revealed the Father by the **message** He delivered — the gospel (vv 18,4-9). Because Jesus delivered this message, He is called “the Word.”

Moses’ message is contrasted to that of Jesus. Each man was a great leader who revealed a major religious system. Moses revealed the Old Testament; Jesus revealed the New Testament. The characteristic of Moses’ message, which is emphasized here, was **law** — commandments to guide men’s conduct. The features of Jesus’ message, which are emphasized here, are **grace and truth** (cf. v14).

Does this mean there was no grace under Moses’ revelation and that Jesus’ revelation contains no law? Well, did Moses’ revelation contain “truth”? Surely it did. So, the point of the passage is not to deny that Moses’ law contained grace and truth, nor is it intended to deny that Jesus’ message can be characterized as law. The point of the verse is to contrast unique or dominant features of each revelation, which result in a different emphasis between the two.

To use this verse to deny that there was grace in Moses’ law would be a perversion. Likewise, it perverts the verse to use it to claim that Jesus’ revelation is **not** a law and contains no commands we must follow! That the New Testament is a law containing commands we must obey to be saved is made clear in Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

The difference emphasized here is that Moses’ law showed men they were sinners but never gave permanent forgiveness, whereas Jesus’ message is able to provide complete forgiveness of sin (grace). Moses’ law was true, but not all of the truth. It was not the complete and final revelation of God’s truth. Jesus’ gospel contains many commands we must obey to receive its blessings, but its unique character compared to the law is that it shows how men can receive grace by Jesus’ sacrifice (cf. Heb. 10:1-18). This explains why the New Testament was needed. If the Old Testament provided all men needed, the New Testament would never have been needed. But more was needed, which is why God sent Jesus to reveal the gospel.

For other passages emphasizing the grace revealed in the gospel, see Acts 15:7-11; 20:24,32; Romans 4:4-7; 5:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:8;

Ephesians 1:5-11; 2:5-10; 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Hebrews 2:9.

For an in-depth discussion of grace in the gospel and how it relates to works, law, and obedience see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.-gospelway.com/instruct/.

Grace and truth – both are needed.

Note that the verse does not say we are saved by “grace alone,” as taught in some human creeds. It says, not that Jesus brought grace only, but that He brought grace **and truth**. Truth is equally emphasized in the gospel, even in this passage that contrasts the gospel to the Old Testament. But truth itself implies the need for knowledge and application of that truth. What good is the revelation of truth to man unless a man studies that truth, learns it, and uses it in his life? To be made free from sin, we must know the truth and abide in it – John 8:31,32. We purify our souls in obeying the truth – 1 Peter 1:22,23.

So even this passage emphasizing grace in the gospel, when understood in light of the gospel teaching about truth, necessarily implies the necessity of obedience. For other passages on the importance of truth in the gospel, see John 1:14; 8:32-36; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17; Romans 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15,25,26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 1:22,23. Study of these passages will confirm the need for truth to be learned and applied.

1:18 - Jesus came to reveal God to man

Jesus was able to reveal God and His will in a way neither Moses nor any other man could do. No man has ever seen God personally. No man (since perhaps Adam) has had a personal relationship with God to know His will first-hand apart from the Bible (John 6:46; Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:11; 1 John 4:12; Col. 1:15).

Jesus was the only begotten Son (see notes on v14; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). He possessed Deity Himself, and He was “in the bosom” of the Father – He had the very closest possible relationship to the Father (this is the significance of “in the bosom” – see 13:23). He was able to do what no one else could do – He could reveal from first-hand knowledge what God’s will and character are like. Further, He was able to show us by His own life what God is like (John 14:9).

Because Jesus partakes of the nature of God and understands first-hand what God is really like, one reason He came to earth was to live a life and present teachings which only He could do. Men could hear directly from the teachings, and could observe from the very life of who possessed Deity, what God is like and what He wills for us. What an incredible concept! God was so determined that man know God and His will in the fullest way possible, that God was willing even to come to earth and live as a man among men.

This is why the emphasis in these introductory verses has been on Jesus as the revelation of God and His will. He is the Word (vv 1ff), the Light (vv 4ff), and the truth (vv 14,17).

John has introduced his account with an amazing picture of Jesus. One who appeared to be “just a man” - and in fact **was** a man - was yet far more than a man. He was God, the very Creator, the only-begotten Son of God, who came in the flesh. This is the view of Jesus that John has introduced and that He intends to give evidence for throughout his account of Jesus’ life.

1:19-51 - John’s Testimony; People Who Subsequently Follow Jesus

1:19-34 - John’s Answer to Questions about His Work

1:19,20 - John the Baptist testifies that he was not the Christ

The rest of John 1 discusses, directly or indirectly, the preaching of John the Baptist and his testimony about Jesus. As usual, John’s account adds some information not found in the other accounts, which helps support the claims of Jesus. John’s testimony regarding Jesus can be found in John 1:6-8,14,15,19-36; 5:31-33; 3:22-30; 10:40,41; Acts 19:4,5, as well as Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3.

The Jews in Jerusalem (Pharisees — v24) sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. The very fact that they sent to ask about him indicates that his preaching had caused a great stir among the people. If he was having no effect at all, why would the leaders bother to be concerned about him? But they were interested enough to investigate. Their manner does not appear to be either favorable or unfavorable at this point; they appear to simply be investigating the facts.

John readily admitted he was **not** the Christ. “Christ” means the anointed one. It is equal to the “Messiah” prophesied in the Old Testament (see further notes on v41). John knew this was not his position, so he did not make false pretensions nor exalt himself to that which he did not deserve. This shows his honesty and humility. The author here again takes the opportunity to show the error of those, then and now, who believed John was the Christ (cf. Luke 3:15). John himself knew better and openly denied having that position.

Note that the fact the people wondered about this shows they were looking for the Christ. Also, note that the ideas about who John might be were similar to those about who Jesus might be (Matt. 16:13ff). Apparently, the Jews understood prophecy well enough to be looking for these people to come. This also shows the significant impact John made on the people that some might wonder if he were the Christ.

1:21 - John was neither Elijah nor “the prophet”

They wondered if he were Elijah. Elijah was expected to come before the Christ (cf. Matt. 11:14; 16:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17; Mal. 4:5). But as with many prophecies, this reference is figurative or symbolic, not literal. Many other passages show that, in the symbolic sense meant by the prophecies, John **was** Elijah — see Mal. 4:5; 3:1ff; cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13. John’s preaching actually was the fulfillment of the prophecies that Elijah would come again.

Why then did he deny being Elijah? Because he was not **literally** the same person as Elijah. He came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). His character and work were similar to Elijah’s and this is what the Malachi prophecy meant. However, he evidently concluded that the men were asking whether or not he was literally Elijah. Since he was not literally Elijah, he answered correctly according to physical reality.

“The prophet” probably refers to the prophet Moses predicted, who would be like Moses — Deut. 18:15; Matt. 21:11. This was fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22ff), who was like Moses in many ways. In particular, both revealed completely new systems or covenants. But the prophecy was not fulfilled in John, so he said it did not. He was a prophet, but not that prophet.

Once again, note John’s humility. He refused to pretend to hold a position or to seek a position, which was not given him by the Lord. He was a great and godly man. That should be enough, and he sought no more.

1:22,23 - John explains his work as preparation for one to come later

John had told who he was **not**, but that did not answer the question of who he **was**, so they asked him again. They needed to know what information to give to those who sent them.

John responded by quoting Isaiah 40:3,4. He understood and directly stated that his work was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. For more about this, see our notes on vv 6-8 above.

John preached in the wilderness. His work was to prepare the way for one coming after who was greater than he was. He made His paths straight in the sense of making the way easier for him.

Jesus’ work would be difficult and so God prepared the people for Him by the preaching of John. John developed a good following, taught the people to repent, and then taught his disciples to follow Jesus. This helped people have right attitudes, and helped Jesus get a much larger following, more easily than otherwise would have happened. Later in this chapter we learn of some followers of John who became followers of Jesus.

Once again, John showed an understanding of his proper role in relation to Christ, and the author of the book explains this to any who might seek to give John a higher or lower position than God intended him to have. Anyone who sought or who seeks to give John a different position, needs to reckon with the statements of John himself.

1:24-28 - Question about John's baptism

The representatives of the Pharisees then asked John why he baptized, if he was not one of these various people whom they had asked him about. Evidently, they realized there was special significance in the fact John baptized people.

Some have claimed that the Jews had begun baptizing Gentile proselytes to the Jewish faith sometime before this. But Johnson points out that there is no evidence for this except in the Talmud which was written two or three centuries after this. So baptizing followers would be a new practice, unknown to these who questioned John.

It is evident from the baptisms done by both John and later by Jesus (4:1f), that baptism was an initiatory rite for disciples. One who was baptized became a follower of the one whose baptism he received. So they wondered why John would baptize, and by what authority he would introduce such a new practice, unless he was one of those great men whom he had denied being.

John's explanation of his baptism

John acknowledged that he baptized with water (literally "in" water). However, he gave no further explanation except to elaborate on his claim that his work was a preparation for someone else to come later. Someone stood among them – someone whom they did not recognize - who was coming after John and yet was pre-eminent over him. He was so much greater than John that John could not even unloose His sandal strap. This would be the work of a menial servant, but John said he did not deserve even that menial task compared to the greatness of the One who would be his successor.

John was baptizing the people to prepare them for the coming of One who would be truly great. (See Matt. 3 & Luke 3 where John discussed the nature of the baptisms Jesus would administer). John appears to be appealing to his work of preparation as the basis of his authority to baptize. He was baptizing, not for the ultimate goal of making disciples for himself, but as a means of accomplishing his work of preparing for Jesus. Those who became his disciples ought eventually to become disciples of the Christ (see notes on 3:25-30).

The things recorded here occurred in Bethabara beyond the Jordan (i.e., east of the Jordan, across it from Jerusalem and the main area of Israel). Some translations have "Bethany." The exact location is unknown. It appears that John moved from place to place in his work (3:23).

1:29-35 - Testimony of John the Baptist Regarding Jesus

1:29 - The Lamb of God

John's testimony of Jesus continued the next day when he saw Jesus. This is the first actual appearance of Jesus as a man on earth in the book of John. Whereas the synoptic accounts describe Jesus' birth, early life, baptism, etc., John's gospel skips all this. Jesus' first appearance occurs after He has been baptized, and John the Baptist is testifying about the significance of who Jesus is. This implies that this account was written long after the other accounts, so it is assumed that the facts of Jesus' early life were already well known from the other accounts.

John called Jesus "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Lambs had special significance as sacrifices for sin under the Old Testament (Leviticus 4:32; Exodus 29:38-42) and as the Passover lamb that died in the place of the first-born sons of Israel (Exodus 12:11-13). Since Jesus died as the sacrifice to give forgiveness and to spare us from dying for our sins, He is often compared to a lamb (Isa. 53:7; John 1:29,36; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6,8,12f; 6:1; etc.).

However, the New Testament reveals that Old Testament sacrifices could not accomplish permanent forgiveness, but sins were remembered every year. Those sacrifices were shadows or symbols of the greater sacrifice to come — the sacrifice of Jesus — which sacrifice could completely take away sins (Heb. 10:1-18; 1 Pet. 2:24).

This also illustrates Jesus' sinlessness. To be an acceptable sacrifice, the lamb had to be without blemish. And to be our sacrifice, Jesus had to be without sin, otherwise death would be the penalty for His own sins. He could pay the penalty for the sins of others only if He Himself was without sin (1 Peter 2:22-24; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus is also, in some passages, presented as being meek and harmless like a lamb.

Who takes away the sins of the world

Note that Jesus can take away the sins of the world. His sacrifice is so perfect, not only can it permanently forgive sins, but it can also take away the sins of everyone. This contrasts to animal sacrifices, which only pertained to the particular people who offered them. If other people wanted forgiveness, they had to offer other sacrifices.

But of equal significance is the fact that, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament law pertained only to the nation of Israel. It was a national law, never intended to be universal in application. Gentiles were essentially excluded (though they could chose to subject themselves to the law by becoming circumcised and, in effect, joining the nation of Israel).

John's statement here anticipates the fact that the gospel of Christ would be a universal covenant, equally available to people of all nations. While the Jewish disciples did not understand this till much later, it was clearly prophesied in many passages like this. For other passages about the universal nature of the gospel, see Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:4,6; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 2:9; John 3:16; Acts 10:34,35; Matthew 11:28; Luke 2:10.

This fact also demonstrates that Jesus must necessarily have intended from the beginning to give a whole new covenant system, different from that which Moses gave. Moses' system was limited in application to the nation of Israel. If Jesus' system were to include salvation for all, it would have to be an entirely different covenant with a different sacrifice. This too is eventually made clear as the gospel is further revealed. See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

For further discussion of the old law as compared to the gospel, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

1:30 - John identifies Jesus as the One for Whom he came to prepare

In v15, John had spoken of one who came after him but was preferred before him, etc. This was the one for whom John came to prepare the way (v23-27). The author applied this to Jesus, showing that He was the One John came to prepare for (vv 15-18). But John the Baptist himself does not identify Jesus as the One he was preparing for until v30. John then said that Jesus is the very One that he had been testifying about and preparing the way for. All that has been said about John's testimony up to this point (cf. vv 6ff) has been speaking about Jesus.

1:31-34 - John describes how he knew Jesus to be the One he was preparing for

At first, John himself did not know exactly whom he was preparing the way for. He knew he was preparing the way for someone who would eventually be revealed to Israel, so he came baptizing as He was guided to do. But he did not know exactly whom he was preparing the way for. That would be revealed to him later.

This does not mean that John did not know anything about Jesus as a person before he baptized Him. John and Jesus were cousins, whose mothers knew one another and became pregnant about the same time by special blessings of God and who knew the sons they would bear would be special servants of God (Luke 1). It is highly unlikely that John knew nothing whatever about Jesus or had never met Him before. Matt 3:13-17 says that, when Jesus came to be baptized,

John said, “It is you that should baptize me.” This would also appear to indicate that John did know Jesus and even knew Him to be a greater teacher than John was.

Vv 10,26 also speak of Jesus saying that people did not “know” Him, yet those people surely knew of His existence. The point is that they were not aware or did not believe in His nature as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. This, most likely, is what John also did not know about Jesus until it was revealed to him.

Though John did not know what individual he was preparing the way for, yet He had been informed that there would be a sign to indicate to him who the individual was: the Spirit would descend like a dove and remain upon Him. This would be the One to come. This sign was fulfilled at Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3; Luke 3).

John concluded that Jesus is the One he had been preparing for and the one who would baptize in the Holy Spirit (whereas John himself baptized in water).

Based on this evidence, John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Son of God (see vv 14,18 regarding Jesus as the only begotten Son). This confirms the relationship with God that Jesus claimed to have, which in turn confirms His Deity.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Note these passages regarding Holy Spirit baptism: Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-21,33; 10:44-49; 11:1-4,15-18 [Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33]

From these passages we learn the following points about Holy Spirit baptism. Note how these points distinguish Holy Spirit baptism from water baptism.

*** Element**

This baptism immersed or overwhelmed people in the Holy Spirit. Note that water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism are here shown to be two separate and distinct baptisms. John contrasts them. But only one baptism is in effect today (Eph. 4:3ff). Most people who claim Holy Spirit baptism today also practice water baptism. According to this passage, that would be two baptisms; but Ephesians 4 says only one is in effect today.

*** Action**

The word “baptize” means to immerse, overwhelm, engulf. This is a spiritual baptism, not physical, in which the subjects were to be overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit.

*** Administrator**

Jesus Himself would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. This baptism required someone greater than John to administer it. Only Jesus

is great enough. No man can or ever has baptized others in the Holy Spirit.

* **Promise**

Holy Spirit baptism was something God promised to do for certain people, not something they were required to do for Him. There was no command to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

* **Subjects**

John's statement promising Holy Spirit baptism was fulfilled upon the apostles on the occasion of the first Jewish converts (Acts 1:4,5, cf. chap. 2), and on the first Gentiles to be converted (Acts 10,11).

* **Choice**

God Himself decided who would receive Holy Spirit baptism (the apostles), when (not many days hence) and where (Jerusalem) - Acts 1:3-8. It was not a blessing offered to all, such that anyone could have it if they chose. God made the choice independently of any man's desire to receive it or not receive it.

* **Purpose**

Holy Spirit baptism gave the apostles **power** to bear **witness** throughout the world (Acts 1:8). And it gave miraculous power of tongues (Acts 2:1-13; 10:46). In the case of Cornelius' household, it was necessary to convince the Jews that God was willing to receive Gentiles as His children (10:45; 11:17,18), so Peter would baptize them in water (10:47,48). [Cf. Acts 15:1-11]

This shows that Holy Spirit baptism was not the same as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling is available to all who wish to be saved, but it does not involve miraculous powers (see the link below for further information).

* **Duration**

Holy Spirit baptism began at **Jerusalem**, "not many days hence" after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:4,5). There were only two recorded instances of Holy Spirit baptism — the apostles when the first Jews were converted, and Cornelius' household when the first Gentiles were converted. No other event in the Bible is described as Holy Spirit baptism. There are other instances of baptism, and other references to the Holy Spirit. But no others are called Holy Spirit baptism.

Holy Spirit baptism ceased. The subjects to receive it were just a few. It was never for all men. Its purpose was fulfilled and it is no longer needed. The message it guided men to receive has now been fully delivered and recorded (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16,17). It is not to be repeated (Jude 3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22f). The written word gives all the evidence we need that Gentiles may be saved by the gospel. Miracles confirmed the new revelation as it was delivered (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:3f). Since revelation is no longer needed, miracles

are no longer needed (John 20:30f; 1 Cor. 13:8-13). Holy Spirit baptism fulfilled its purpose and ceased soon after the gospel was first preached. Today, there is only one baptism – water baptism for remission of sins (Ephesians 4:4-6).

For more details regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit, miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as compared to water baptism of the gospel, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

1:35-51 - Five Men Who Become Disciples of Jesus

1:35-37 - John introduces two of his disciples to Jesus

On the next day John again testified regarding Jesus. He was with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus and again called Him the Lamb of God (see notes on v29). These two disciples in turn followed Jesus.

One of these disciples turned out to be Andrew, the brother of Peter (v40). There is good reason to believe that the other disciple was John the apostle, who wrote this book. This conclusion is based on the fact that the apostle John often describes stories at which he was personally present but does not name himself (cf. 13:26; 19:26,35; 21:7,20,24; see introductory notes).

Andrew and Peter were fishing partners with James and John, so it is very possible that John was with Andrew on this occasion. It is almost certain that, whatever Andrew and Peter knew about John the Baptist and Jesus, their partners would soon know it too.

Note how the remainder of the story mentions a total of five people who became disciples of Jesus. The other four are all named and all became apostles: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael (assuming Nathanael is the same as the apostle Bartholomew – see on vv 45ff). This strongly implies that this account is intended to introduce us to five of Jesus' first disciples, all of whom became apostles. In that case, the unnamed disciple must surely be John the apostle.

There can be no doubt from other accounts that John was one of Jesus' earliest disciples, and it is entirely possible that He was one of John's disciples. If so, then he witnessed directly or indirectly everything he records in this book.

Note that the effect of John's teaching, as it ought to have been, was that it made followers for Jesus. The ultimate goal was not to make followers for John, but for the One for whom John was preparing the way.

1:38,39 - The two disciples spend time with Jesus

As the two disciples of John followed Jesus, He asked what they were looking for. They asked where He was staying and He allowed them to come and see for themselves. They went and spent the day

with him, it being about the tenth hour at the time (4:00PM, assuming John was using Jewish time). We are told nothing about the place where He was staying, which shows that the place was not the important point of the story. What was important was that the disciples had the opportunity to be introduced to Jesus and His teaching.

The two addressed Jesus as “Rabbi,” a term meaning teacher. It was commonly used in that day (and yet today) by Jewish people to refer to their teachers.

The result was the two disciples remained that day with Jesus. Obviously, this gave Him the opportunity to teach them and gave them the opportunity to observe Him for themselves. The results evidently convinced them to believe in Him (see vv 40ff).

All this fits the view, described earlier, that this section is introducing us to several of the men who later became apostles. It specifically introduces us to John, who is writing the account. And in the process, of course, it gives John the opportunity to provide evidence about Jesus, so that we can all have opportunity to believe in Him, even as His first disciples believed in Him.

1:40,41 - Andrew finds his brother Simon

Of these two disciples who followed Jesus in vv 35-39, one was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He found Simon and told him they had found the Messiah, the Christ. Messiah is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Christ (see notes on v20). John had been asked whether he were the Christ, but he denied it (v20). But he had come to prepare the way for One who was greater than he. He had identified Jesus as being that One, and Andrew concluded that Jesus was the Christ.

The Hebrew word Messiah and Greek Christ mean one who is anointed. Anointing (usually with oil) was a symbolic ritual in the Old Testament to dedicate or appoint someone to a special work. It was most common for kings (1 Samuel 9:16; 10:1; 16:13), but was also done for priests (Leviticus 4:3) and sometimes prophets (Psalms 105:15). Jesus held all three of these positions (which no one did under the Old Testament), but the special significance is that He would be the King or Ruler of God’s special people under the New Testament. Jesus was the rightful heir of David’s throne by lineage, but especially He was chosen of God to be the King of the spiritual New Testament kingdom (cf. v49).

Having found the Christ, in his zeal Andrew wanted other people to know about Him too. We ought all to respect this zeal in Andrew and imitate it. We too ought to tell all our friends and relatives about the blessings they can have if they accept the truth about Jesus.

Note that Andrew and Peter both eventually became apostles. Very little is ever told us specifically about Andrew except that he was Peter’s brother. But regardless of what else he may have ever accom-

plished, bringing his brother to the Lord was a great accomplishment, since his brother became one of the most influential of apostles, preaching the first gospel sermon, etc.

We too may never personally accomplish things that put us much in the public eye. But if we convert a few souls for the Lord, and they accomplish much in His service, then through them we have accomplished much good that otherwise might never have occurred.

1:42 – Jesus gives Simon the name Cephas (Peter)

Note that Andrew did not personally teach Peter all that Peter needed to know to become a disciple. But he did bring Peter to the teacher who could tell him what he needed to know. So we may not be versed enough to instruct people fully and answer all their questions, but if we just set up Bible studies for other teachers and let them do the teaching, we have accomplished what we can.

Jesus said Simon was the son of Jonah (or John); which, of course, means Andrew also was a son of Jonah. Jesus gave Simon the name of Cephas (Hebrew), which is the equivalent of Peter in Greek. Apparently, he was called simply Simon before this time, but Jesus gave the additional name of Peter.

This name means a stone. Catholic writers tie this to Matt. 16:18 and conclude this proves that Peter was the “rock” on which Jesus built His church, and that is the reason Jesus changed his name. However, this is nowhere stated to be the case here or elsewhere.

The word for “rock” in Matt. 16:18 is a related but different Greek word (observe that the NKJV here translates the name of Peter “a stone,” not a “rock”). The context of Matt. 16:18, combined with 1 Cor. 3:11, shows that the rock on which the church is built is, not Peter, but Jesus and the fact He is God’s Son (see notes on that passage).

For an in-depth study about whether Peter was the first Pope, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Exactly why Jesus made this name change is not stated here or elsewhere. Perhaps it was a reference to Peter’s character that, although he was impetuous and unstable at first, he would later become solid and established in the faith like a stone.

1:43,44 - Philip becomes a disciple

On the next day, Jesus wanted to go back to Galilee (apparently intended to leave the place where John the Baptist had seen Him). He found Philip, who was from Bethsaida, the same city where Andrew and Peter were from. This city is located on the Sea of Galilee, somewhere near Capernaum at the northern end of the sea [see **map**]. Peter and Andrew were fishermen there, according to other accounts, in partnership with James and John.

Jesus called Philip to follow Him. This was a way He several times called people to be His disciples. This is the first recorded example of Jesus' use of this concept. To follow Him is to be His disciple (literally meaning a follower), not just to physically follow him to some place.

We are not told what Jesus further said to Philip to convince him to become a disciple. Unlike the two disciples in vv 35ff, Philip is not stated to have been a disciple of John, although context and location of this event may lead us to suspect that he was. In any case, Jesus appears to have taken the initiative in calling Philip.

Philip later became an apostle, as did Nathanael, whom we read about in the next verse.

1:45,46 - Philip invites Nathanael to Jesus

Philip shared Andrew's desire to spread the news about Jesus. He found Nathanael and told him that they had found the one prophesied about in the law and prophets. He said he was Jesus, son of Joseph. This does not deny the virgin birth. Philip may not have known about that at this point. But in any case, Jesus was legally the son of Joseph, his heir, etc., just like an adopted child is treated and spoken of as the "son" of his adoptive father.

The author uses the testimony of Philip to introduce another argument to support Jesus' claims: He fulfilled the prophecies of the Christ found in the law and prophets. Specific examples will be cited in the gospel accounts as we proceed through Jesus' life.

John here familiarizes us with five of Jesus' earliest disciples, all of whom eventually became apostles. John gives information not found elsewhere, and helps us learn especially about three men who are little mentioned in other accounts. John personally knew all these men, especially Andrew and Peter, and could speak of these matters from close association with them.

The only other reference to this man by the name Nathanael is found in 21:2, where he is said to have come from Cana in Galilee. But that account, like this one in chap. 1, places him in the company of other apostles. This makes it highly likely that Nathanael was himself an apostle, probably the one called Bartholomew in the lists of apostles in the other accounts (see McGarvey's *Fourfold Gospel*). Men in the Bible often had more than one name –one a given name and another a family name or a second name more commonly used. Bartholomew means literally, son of Tolmai, so it identifies him by his family relationship, as was commonly done in that day. Cf. Simon Bar-Jonah, etc. Hence, it is likely that Bartholomew had another name.

Nathanael's skeptical remark about Jesus hometown shows that Nazareth was held in contempt. How could anything good come out of it? Philip urged him to see for himself. Jesus obviously grew up in a town that had a lowly reputation.

We also learn that, when we try to lead people to the truth, we should give them evidence on which to believe. Specifically, let them see for themselves what Jesus was like and what are the evidences for His claims. If they are skeptical at first, do not give up but get them to personally learn about Jesus, read the Bible accounts for themselves. Don't expect them to accept just because we do or on the basis of our opinion.

1:47 - Jesus praises Nathanael for his honest character

On seeing Nathanael coming, apparently before He had even met him, Jesus described him as an Israelite indeed, in who is no guile (deceit). Jesus knew what was in man (2:25), so He apparently could read a man's heart and character. This is a power only Deity possesses (1 Kings 8:39). It seems Jesus used this power in choosing His apostles.

Jesus viewed Nathanael as an honest man, who never was deceitful. This should also be said of us. He was an Israelite indeed — i.e., not just one of God's people by natural birth, but by character and conduct he lived the way God wanted His people to live. (King says that Jesus statement refers to the fact that Nathanael was outspoken. But I don't know why we should assume that. Lots of people are guileless or free from deceit, but are not particularly outspoken.)

Apparently, Nathanael made a sincere effort to be free from deceit, so Jesus statement led to a response from Nathanael as in the following verses.

1:48,49 - Jesus' knowledge of Nathanael leads to his conviction

Nathanael was surprised that Jesus knew anything about him, so he asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus said He had seen Nathanael under the fig tree before Philip called him. We are not told specifically when or where Nathanael had been under a fig tree. But Jesus' statement revealed superhuman knowledge, since Nathanael knew Jesus had not been present when he was under the fig tree. Perhaps no one else was present and knew about it, but obviously neither Philip nor anyone else had as yet said anything about the incident. Nathanael knew there was no way Jesus could have known this by human power, so he accepted Philip's conclusion about who Jesus was.

He addressed Jesus as "Rabbi" (cf. v38). He called Jesus "the Son of God" and "King of Israel." These statements constituted Nathanael's confession that he accepted Jesus as the Christ and the rightful ruler over Israel (see on the expression "Christ" in vv 20,41). He had witnessed superhuman power, but whether or not he meant to admit Jesus' Deity in the expression "Son of God" seems unclear. John the Baptist had, however, already used this term for Jesus (v34).

1:50,51 - Jesus assures Nathanael of greater proofs to come

Jesus stated that if Nathanael believed on the basis of the evidence he had so far received, he would see greater things than that. This also seems to imply that Nathanael, along with the other apostles, would accompany Jesus and witness many of the great miracles He would yet accomplish. His knowledge of Nathanael's conduct was one of His less significant achievements.

The NKJV translation "most assuredly" gives the meaning of the expression which is otherwise translated "verily, verily," or literally "amen, amen." It was a statement of strong affirmation of a great truth. The expression is unique to Jesus' teaching and is found rarely if ever in any other man's teaching.

In fact, Jesus said people would see the heavens opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (Jesus). This seems to refer back to Jacob's dream of the ladder into heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it (Gen. 28:10-17). It is highly unlikely that an event would literally occur in which angels would ascend and descend upon Jesus. Apparently the meaning is not literal, but like many of Jesus' descriptions of Himself in John and elsewhere, it was a spiritual expression (like "I am the vine," "I am the sheepfold," etc.). The most likely meaning is that Jesus would become a means of communion and fellowship between God and man, so that God would give many blessings to man by way of Jesus. He is now our mediator and intercessor as High Priest (see 1 Tim. 2:5; and the book of Hebrews).

Note some of the titles or descriptions given to Jesus already in the testimony of John and these early disciples:

Lamb of God (vv 29,35)

Son of God (vv 34,49)

Rabbi (vv 38,49)

Messiah or Christ (v41)

One that Moses and the prophets predicted (v45)

King of Israel (v49)

Son of man (v51)

John 2

Chap. 2 - The Miracle of Water to Wine and Cleansing the Temple

2:1-12 - Jesus' First Miracle: Water Turned to Wine

2:1,2 - Jesus and His disciples attend a wedding ceremony

On the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee (the exact location of which is uncertain, but several sites are suggested). Jesus' mother attended, as did Jesus and His disciples. Note that by this time Jesus is said to have had disciples. Doubtless this included the ones who began to follow Him at the end of chap. 1 and probably others.

The presence of Jesus and His disciples proves that Jesus was a sociable person, not a recluse from society. It also shows Jesus' approval upon the institution of marriage and of wedding ceremonies in particular. Though He Himself never married, it is not because He opposed marriage nor even because He believed those who marry are somehow spiritually inferior to those who do not (as some people think). Marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4). God created woman for man because it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18ff). Jesus honored marriage.

We might add that the account shows that Jesus was not opposed to enjoying pleasant celebrations. While He would never have fellowship with any activity that was immoral or unwholesome, yet He attended this wedding, which surely involved feasting, merrymaking, and celebration. It was what we would call a party or banquet. And He even provided some of the refreshments. Jesus was not opposed to recreation, entertainment, or enjoyments that were wholesome of themselves.

2:3-5 - Mary requests Jesus to provide wine

At some point in the proceedings, they ran out of wine. Jesus' mother informed Him of this, evidently expecting Him to do something about it. Wedding ceremonies in that day, we are told, sometimes lasted for several days (this may be implied in Gen. 29:27; Judges 14:10-12). Many guests might attend, so apparently the family had miscalculated the amount of wine that would be needed. To run out of food and provisions for the guests was a serious social embarrassment.

Jesus however responded by asking Mary what her concern had to do with Him, for His hour had not yet come. He is not here speaking disrespectfully to His mother, but He is showing her that, though she is his mother in the flesh, His decisions about what He should do are based on higher considerations. He must be about His Father's work, and this is controlled by His Father's will.

Such statements appear to contradict Catholic teaching. Their belief in prayer to Mary is based on the view that Mary "commands her Son," and Jesus must obey His mother's will. In matters pertaining to His ministry, teaching, and miracles, however, Mary had no authority over Jesus. In any case, it seems clear that Jesus had to act according to higher principles than the wishes of Mary.

Jesus did, however, eventually do the miracle that Mary requested. In fact, she proceeded to make arrangements for Him to do it. So what does His statement mean? Perhaps at the time He made the statement God had not yet given Him instructions to proceed with miracles, but He did so soon after Mary made the request. Some commentaries think it simply was not yet the right time in the feast to do the miracle, but that time eventually came. (Jesus often uses the expression "my hour" to refer to His death, but that does not seem to have connection to this passage — John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 17:1; Matt. 26:45; Luke 22:53.)

King expresses the helpful thought that Jesus had not, at first, intended to begin His miracles this early in His ministry, but He had soon planned to do so. However, this was not a matter "set in stone," nor had God given a definite instruction to Jesus about when to do His first miracle. It was not a matter of right or wrong if Jesus began His miracles at this time — it was just not what He had originally planned. However, the fact that He did do the miracle indicates that God's decisions can be influenced by the requests of His people. This illustrates the power of prayer. God may not have originally planned to do a thing a certain way, but the prayers of His people may change His plans, if it can be done without harm to any greater principle.

Evidently, Mary did not take Jesus' statement as an absolute denial, for she told the servants to do whatever He said to do. Perhaps she hoped that He might do a miracle and wanted to do all she could to encourage Him, or perhaps she expected Him to provide the wine in some non-miraculous way. In any case, she did not take His response as an absolute refusal.

We are later told that, when Jesus had done the miracle, it was His first (v11). Why then would Mary have been expecting a miracle? She surely knew about the miracles involved in His birth. The virgin birth obviously directly involved her, and she surely remembered the visions of the angels. She most likely knew of the Father's speaking from heaven at Jesus' baptism. These miracles had been done to Jesus

or about Him, not by Him; yet perhaps all this gave her faith that He could do this. And she could see for herself the evidence that He was making disciples and obviously preparing to begin public teaching. Or perhaps she did not know what He would do, but just was confident He could solve the problems by some means or other.

2:6,7 - Six water pots filled with water

Six water pots were standing nearby, available for purifying as practiced by the Jews (perhaps the practice of washing before eating). Each of the six contained 2-3 firkins (ASV) (perhaps some were a little larger and some a little smaller). *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says a firkin is 10.3 U.S. gallons, though some commentators say it was less, maybe only 7 1/2 gallons. The NKJV calculates each jar as 20-30 gallons. If so, the total amount would be 120-180 gallons. They were filled with water to the very brim.

The purpose of these details is to emphasize what was important in John's account. He is showing the greatness of the miracle to give evidence for Jesus' claims. This is the first of Jesus' miracles, and John uses it to establish faith in Him. As a result, many details are not mentioned (such as who the bride and groom were, etc.). Yet, the details that are mentioned help show the greatness of the miracle.

This event did not involve a handful of liquid that may have been mistaken in origin. Nor was it possible for someone to have slipped some strong wine into each pot to be diluted by the water. The jars were filled to the brim with water and that is what miraculously became the wine served at the feast. And the quantity was huge to prove the power required.

2:8-10 - The water became wine

Jesus had the servants take the water pots to the ruler or master of the feast. A man was in charge of the feast, and it was one of his jobs to check the wine. He tasted its quality, but some claim that he was especially to check on the alcoholic content. We will discuss later the aspect of intoxication and alcohol as relates to this wine. But decent people made sure that wine at their feasts was not such as to make people drunk.

The water had now become wine, but the ruler did not know how this happened — only the servants knew. The ruler called the bridegroom and complimented this wine by saying that people customarily gave better wine at the beginning of the feast and then poorer quality wine after men had been drinking awhile. However, in this case the better wine had been saved for the last.

No doubt John recorded this, not because he wanted to approve the common practice, but because he wanted to show that the wine Jesus made was good quality and could not possibly be a fraud. It was such real wine that it tasted even better than the real wine that had

already been provided. Note that the ruler is not saying this wine was intoxicating nor was he saying anyone there was drunk. He was simply commenting on the **taste** of the wine Jesus made by contrasting what happened here to the usual practice.

2:11 - This was Jesus' first miracle

This was the beginning of Jesus' miracles. It proved Jesus' power to turn one substance into something completely different. As such, it was impossible by natural law — a miracle. Water combined with other nutrients can be made into wine by grape vines, but it takes months of natural processes. Jesus did the same in an instant. This is especially interesting in light of the claim that Jesus is the Creator (1:3). Here He duplicates in an instant of time that which His Creation takes months to accomplish.

This demonstrated His glory and caused His disciples to believe on Him. Note that John records seven miracles, often including miracles not mentioned by other gospel writers or giving details that others do not give. But in each case he is careful to give sufficient details to make sure the miracles provide evidence of who Jesus is.

So, from this very first miracle, John makes clear that we are aware that the purpose of the miracles was to give people reason to believe. Jesus' claims had to be substantiated, and the disciples needed evidence to convince them to preach His message with conviction and to suffer for His cause. His miracles accomplish the same purpose for us and give unbelievers reason to believe (Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31).

For an in-depth study about the nature and purpose of miracles, see our articles on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Implications for social drinking

Some people use this passage to justify modern social drinking “in moderation”: if Jesus provided wine at a feast, why can't we today drink alcoholic beverages at social gatherings?

Remember first that the purpose of this account was, not to teach us about drinking wine, but to substantiate Jesus' claims by showing His power of doing miracles. Let us not lose sight of this in discussing side issues. Details, that might be interesting in a discussion of wine drinking, are not given because they are not relevant to the point of the story. To understand Bible teaching about drinking alcoholic beverages, we must go elsewhere.

The meaning of the word “wine”

Many words, like “baptism,” “church,” and others, have different meanings today from used in the Bible. So “wine” in the Bible does not

mean what “wine” means today, but was similar to our use of “cider”: it could be fermented or unfermented, depending on context.

(1) Wine was often unfermented (Isa. 16:10; 65:8; Jer 48:33; Rev. 19:15 — cf. Rev. 14:10; Gen. 40:9-11). This “wine” was often spoken of as a blessing. Some claim the wine in John 2 had to be fermented because wine could not be kept unfermented till this time of year. But any good encyclopedia will show clear evidence that people then knew how to keep wine unfermented.

(2) Sometimes grape juice was boiled down to syrup and kept unfermented. This was later diluted again to make a non-alcoholic grape drink.

(3) Obviously “wine” was sometimes fermented, but again encyclopedias show that our wines today are much more intoxicating than even the alcoholic wines of Bible times. Their wines were naturally lower in alcohol due to climate, and they never fortified their wines with distilled alcohol as is often done today. The distilling process was unknown then. Instead, custom demanded that, when fermented wine was used (as at feasts) it must be diluted with water (3 parts water to one part wine, and some say even more dilute) to cut the alcoholic content. And even then care was taken to avoid over-indulgence. Drinking of fermented wine without dilution was always considered strong wine or much wine (Rev. 14:10). These facts are confirmed both by secular encyclopedias and religious commentators. Alcoholic wine is never viewed in Scripture as a blessing, but is often warned against as a danger.

If Jesus provided alcoholic drinks such as are common in our society, then He provided for or at least tempted people to drunkenness.

The passage says Jesus *provided* wine, which would make His influence and fellowship important. *If the “wine” was like today’s alcoholic drinks, then He provided 120-180 gallons of a poisonous, addictive, mind-altering, narcotic drug for people who had drunk up all the booze in sight!* Surely that would encourage some people, not to moderation, but to excess! This would make Jesus little less than a bartender! Even the world admits the one of every ten social drinkers becomes an alcoholic or problem drinker. Knowing this, would Jesus provide people with booze like we have today after repeatedly warning against the dangers of drunkenness and alcoholic drink (cf. Eph. 5:11,18; Proverbs 23:29-32)? 1 Pet. 4:1-4 likewise condemns “banqueting” or “drinking parties,” which is what modern social drinking is. Would Jesus be a good influence and example if He provided 120-180 gallons of alcoholic drinks like we have today?

Isaacs (Jewish rabbi) says: “The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks ... they employ the fruit of the vine – that is, fresh

grapes – unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption ... rottenness.” (Patton, p70)

Some claim the reference to giving inferior wine when guests have “well drunk” proves that this was wine that could make people drunk.

Actually, the reference is just to people being satisfied with drink. Many translations translate the expression “have well drunk” (ASV, NKJV) – not necessarily intoxication. Food and drink are not nearly as attractive when we are full as they are when we are hungry and thirsty, so the usual practice was to give the best food and drink at the beginning of the feast. Forms of the Greek word for “drunk” are used in the LXX in Psalms 36:8; 65:10; Isaiah 55:10; 58:11; Jer. 31:14,25 to mean simply filled or satisfied. (See McQuiggan, pp 118,119.)

In any case, the statement referred to typical practice, not to this particular case. This case was clearly different – that is the point of the statement - in which case we have no proof the wine was intoxicating.

But if this statement does mean that people were drunk in this case, then Jesus provided booze for people who were drinking to **excess**, not in **moderation**. The result of the argument would mean Jesus provided 120+ gallons of booze for a bunch of drunks! No, sir! Not my Lord! But if the wine was nonalcoholic, the whole story makes sense.

We conclude that the wine Jesus made was not intoxicating like modern wines. This confirms our previous conclusion that Bible wines were not always intoxicating like modern drinks. And instead of an argument in favor of modern social drinking, what we really have is an argument against it. The passage shows that Jesus did **not** provide the kind of alcoholic drinks commonly used in our society. And we have further evidence that the wines that are described favorably were non-alcoholic.

In any case, social drinking cannot successfully be defended on the basis of this passage. We need not prove from this passage that social drinking is wrong. That can be settled elsewhere. But this passage is no defense for those who argue for social drinking.

2:12 - Jesus goes to Capernaum

After the miracle at Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples. Capernaum was a city on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee (see **map**). They stayed there not long in terms of days. Capernaum seems after this to be somewhat a home base for Jesus. He did not apparently live at Nazareth any longer.

Note that, contrary to Catholic doctrine, Jesus did have “brothers.” These were His brothers in the same sense that Mary was His mother. It was not a spiritual relationship, nor were they just cous-

ins. They were brothers in the flesh in His immediate family like Mary was His mother in the flesh in His immediate family. Other passages name the brothers, and still others state that He also had sisters. They show conclusively that these people were physical members of His physical family like Mary was His earthly mother. Hence, Mary was not a perpetual virgin after Jesus' birth. See also Matt. 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:32; 6:3; Luke 8:19,20; John 7:3,5,10; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19. (Johnson has an excellent summary of the evidence on this matter. See also McGarvey's *Fourfold Gospel*.)

The fact that Joseph is nowhere mentioned is taken by many to imply that he had died by this time.

2:13-25 - Cleansing of the Temple

2:13 - Jesus attends the Passover

Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover. This was an annual Jewish feast in memorial of the time God slew all the firstborn of Egypt but spared the Israelites because they had put the blood of lambs on their doorposts (cf. Exodus 12 & 13).

It seems significant that this was Jesus' first recorded public act in His ministry. He had been baptized and had made some disciples in Galilee and had done a miracle. But after a brief period at Capernaum, He went to the temple in Jerusalem, for His first major acts at the center of Jewish worship. But He did not begin by quietly preaching a message of sweetness and positive mental attitude. He began by creating a major confrontation against the perversions of the Jews!

2:14-17 - People selling animals and changing money in the temple

In the temple Jesus found people who changed money and people who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, all of which were animals commonly used as sacrifices. Jews were obligated to pay a tax for care of the temple of 1/2 shekel — Ex. 30:13; Matt. 17:24. Presumably, the money was exchanged for this purpose. Some commentators explain that Roman money was in common use, but only Jewish money was accepted for the temple tax, thus requiring the change of money.

"In the temple" cannot possibly mean in the physical building itself, which was built as a replacement of the tabernacle. That is, this was not done in the Holy Place or Most Holy Place. Only the priests were allowed there, and anyone else who entered was put to death. Even these callous Jews would not have allowed that.

But the temple area had become a complex of courtyards and porches. After the beginning of the church, the Jerusalem congregation met in a porch of the temple. Other meetings occurred there. So various areas of the temple compound were open to the public, and the entire area is here and elsewhere referred to as "the temple." These mer-

chants had set up business in some of these areas of the temple, yet Jesus still objected.

Jesus drives them out.

Jesus made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple — sheep, oxen, etc. — and he overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. Presumably He used the scourge in driving out the sheep and oxen, although it is not directly stated exactly who or what, if anything, He struck with the scourge. It is possible that the mere threat of its use was enough to drive them out. Animals and men have often been “driven” by means of a whip without ever being struck — the mere threat of the whip being enough to motivate them.

On the other hand, based on Jesus’ own teaching elsewhere (such as Matt. 5), if it was wrong to actually beat men with the scourge, then it would have been wrong to threaten to do it. Whether or not He struck men is not stated; but acting as the authorized Son of God, He would have had the right to do so, especially under the Old Testament law with its physical punishments for sin.

This is not the only time Jesus cleansed the temple. He did the same thing later on a different occasion when He visited Jerusalem (Matt. 21:12,13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47). Obviously, these men returned after He left. Apparently, the rulers, who ought to have kept them out, did not oppose the activity. So Jesus was opposing, not just the men who were making a financial profit, but probably also the people in charge of the temple. Consider the courage it would require to take the stand Jesus did here.

The reasons for Jesus’ action

Jesus’ found justification for His deed in Scripture. The temple should have been a house of prayer (Mark 11:15; Matt. 21:13; cf. Isa. 56:7), but they had made it a den of thieves (Jer. 7:11) or a house of merchandise (John 2:16). When Jesus had cleansed the temple, Jesus’ disciples remembered the Scripture that said this was an indication of zeal for God’s house (Psalm 69:9).

The activities Jesus removed pertained, indirectly to the worship. The animals were offered for sacrifice, and the change was made so people could pay the temple taxes, sacrifices, etc. God Himself had commanded these sacrifices and taxes God. What then was the problem?

Probably some of these men were corrupt in overcharging for their products to take advantage of people who needed sacrifices but could not easily obtain them elsewhere. So, God’s worship requirements were being used as a means for personal profit to line the pockets of the merchandisers without regard for God or man (“a den of thieves”).

But there was another reason the practice was objectionable. Even if the fee had been fair and just, the business (“merchandise”) should

still have been conducted elsewhere. With fair business dealings, selling the doves and making change may have been acceptable as a business matter. But to do it on the premises of the temple was a perversion of the purpose of the temple. It was to be a house of prayer — worship and spiritual service — not a place of making financial gain (a “house of merchandise”). Jesus’ zeal for the temple required Him to resist these perversions of its purpose.

Lessons for us

Note that this presents several lessons for today.

(1) God distinguishes between worship activities and everyday activities (what we call “secular activities”). This is a valid distinction and, in Scripture, the two are at times separated with regard to time and circumstance. The Old Testament often referred to acts specifically designated for worship to God as “holy” — set apart for a special use. He rebuked Israel for not distinguishing the holy from the common.

When God gives a spiritual purpose to an activity or an ordinance, we displease Him greatly when we change that purpose to another purpose, especially one that is materialistic or physical in emphasis, to satisfy human desires instead of giving Him honor and praise. Note, for example, Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians for turning the Lord’s Supper into a common meal (1 Corinthians 11:17ff).

(2) God does not have to expressly say a thing is wrong for it to be wrong. I know of no Old Testament passage that expressly forbade selling or making change in the temple (though unfair business practices were often condemned). But God said what the temple was for, and these activities were not included. Likewise, we are wrong if we simply do things differently from what He said, in ways that are not authorized or not included in what God commanded. This is the principle that we must have Bible authority for all we do, and we must not change what God has said and follow human ideas instead (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

(3) Specific applications of these principles can be made in numerous areas, because similar conduct is common today in the name of religion.

Consider, for example, modern-day “faith healers” who claim they can do miracles by the power of God like Jesus and His apostles did. But they expect and may even require a generous donation first. Many of them get filthy rich, and yet they are not doing true miracles. In many cases they are frauds and know it. Religion has become “a house of merchandise” and in many cases “a den of thieves.”

Other groups make merchandise off the people by offering spiritual benefits (indulgences, masses), but the people must pay a fee for the service. Often these services are not Scriptural or not needed by the

people, but the religious leaders convince people it is needed and then charge a fee or otherwise get rich off it.

Then compare the modern “Social Gospel” movement. The church is God’s temple today — not a building, but the people, and particularly the local congregation (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Eph. 2:19-22). God sanctified the church for spiritual purposes, to worship Him and teach His word, just as the Old Testament temple was (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 14; Eph. 4:16; etc.). Yet many people today seek to get the church involved in sponsoring or using its facilities for recreation, entertainment, business activities, social gatherings, secular education, common meals, kitchens, camps, gymnasiums, “fellowship halls,” and other physical activities of personal desire and enjoyment.

Often this is justified by seeking a connection of some kind between the activity and the work of the church — just like in these examples in the temple. But the fact is that the activity itself is no part of what God authorized the church to do, nor is it spiritual in its nature and emphasis. There may be no specific passage forbidding such, but it violates God’s purpose and intent for His church just as surely as these moneychangers in the temple. And Jesus, were He to return, would cast them out of His church as surely as He cast these money changers out of the temple. Those who share His zeal for the church will act as He would.

This is not to say that it is wrong to financially support a preacher of God’s word, if each member is simply expected to give in accord with prosperity. Support of preachers is expressly taught in God’s word (2 Cor. 11:8,9; Phil. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 9:6-14). But every member should give voluntarily in accord with His ability and prosperity. And every person, member or not, should be offered the teaching in accord with his need. The service a person receives should depend, not on his ability to pay, but on his need.

What is objectionable are activities that are not authorized in God’s word for the church, or spiritual services which people genuinely need, but can’t obtain unless they can pay for it, or the rich people get more spiritual benefit because they have more money to buy the services. Such was never God’s intent.

We today need to have the same zeal for the purity of God’s spiritual temple, the church, that Jesus had for the temple in Jerusalem. Let the church focus on its lofty purposes of preaching the gospel, worshipping God, and saving souls, but not come down from those works to engage in material interests and pleasing the physical desires of the people — “a house of merchandise.”

For an in-depth study about the work and organization of the church, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

2:18 - The Jews challenge Jesus right to cleanse the temple

No doubt the Jews were surprised or even angered by Jesus' action. They asked Him what sign He did, since He had acted so. The request was, in effect, a question regarding His authority or right to so act. This was the proper purpose of signs — to validate the teaching or action of a man as being from God. The Jews asked Him a similar question after He cleansed the temple the second time (Matt. 21:23). The fact they asked these questions implies that they were responsible for, or in agreement with, the activities that Jesus had cast out.

Asking for authority for a man's action is a good thing to do. As demonstrated here and on other occasions, however, Jesus knew that these people did not really respect Divine authority (note vv 24,25). In fact, had the Jews been more concerned about having proper authority, they would never have allowed these practices in the temple to begin with (see notes above). As His ministry proceeded, Jesus often did numerous signs to prove He was from God; but instead of accepting the evidence and believing in Him, they became more and more antagonistic.

But in this case, Jesus had already explained His authority when He quoted Scripture (again, see notes above). The Jews needed to learn that signs are not needed when Scriptural authority has been cited. The Scriptures constitute authority from God validated by the record of the signs they contain. Likewise, people today need to learn that signs are not needed at all now that all truth has been revealed, recorded, and confirmed (2 Tim. 3:16,17; John 20:30,31; Luke 16:19-31; 1 Cor. 13; Jude 3).

Nevertheless, though a sign was not needed, Jesus gave them one anyway, as shown in the next verse.

2:19-21 - The sign of Jesus' temple

The sign Jesus offered was not one that would happen immediately. Instead, He predicted a future sign: They would destroy the temple and in three days He would raise it up. He was speaking of His body, using the physical temple they were standing in as a symbol of His bodily temple. They would kill Him; but three days later, He would arise.

The Jews, however, assumed He was referring to the temple buildings (which He had just cleansed). So, they objected that it had taken 46 years to build them, so how could He restore them in three days? Solomon had built the original temple and Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it. The Jews rebuilt it after they returned and Herod had been 46 years in the process of restoring it (McGarvey says that the restoration was still in progress at that time and continued till 64 AD). This temple was then destroyed by Rome in 70 AD, just shortly after the renovation was completed.

Note that the Jews' confusion over this point continued. In fact, they offered this as an excuse later to kill Him, claiming He had said He would destroy the temple — Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58. The same charge was raised against Stephen before he was stoned (Acts 6:14).

Though the Jews misunderstood, Jesus was here offering them the greatest sign of all as proof of His authority — the resurrection. This is the fundamental proof of who He was. The apostles repeatedly used it to prove His claims, and we should do the same. When people questioned Him, this was the highest evidence He could produce (John 20:24-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-8ff; Rom. 1:4; cf. Acts 2:22ff; etc.).

It is ironic that, although Jesus here referred to the destruction of the temple of His body, yet He later prophesied the destruction of the physical temple buildings (Matthew 24). And that temple was destroyed, because of the willful rebellion of the Jews in general against God's will. They continued in disobedience, so He allowed the destruction of their national monument. And the ultimate expression of their rejection of God was that they killed Jesus. Because they destroyed Jesus' temple, God destroyed their temple. So indirectly, Jesus statement did predict that they would be responsible for the destruction of the physical temple building!

Note that He knew, from the very outset of His ministry that He would have to die. Premillennial and other folks are sorely mistaken when they think that Jesus came expecting to be an earthly king, but had to change His plans when people rejected Him. Nonsense! Jesus knew and stated from the beginning what would happen, as many other passages confirm (see notes on Acts 2 & 3).

This was the first of many examples recorded in John (and other gospel accounts) in which the people, especially the Jewish leaders, misunderstood Jesus' teaching. These misunderstandings resulted from their rebellious resistance to truth. Jesus often deliberately spoke in such a way that their sinful attitudes would cause them to not understand, yet He explained His meaning further for those sincere followers whose hearts were open to truth. Yet even they, as in this case, may have required considerable time before coming to an understanding.

This example also illustrates how these misunderstandings were often caused by the fact that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual application, but people insisted on making a physical application of the statement. Time and again He spoke spiritually — especially of Himself and His work — but they misunderstood because they failed to see the spiritual application. We will observe this repeatedly as the record proceeds.

2:22 - The disciples eventually understand Jesus' statement

The disciples may not have understood Jesus' statement at the time, but later they remembered it and saw the significance. The result

of this was to produce faith. This is the purpose of miracles and of the prophecies of Christ. They confirm that He was who He claimed to be.

In addition, consider the multiplied power of this miracle in light of the fact that Jesus had predicted it ahead of time. It is amazing enough that He arose. It is far more increasingly evident that He was who He claimed to be in that He predicted ahead of time He would do this. It is incredible that anyone could arise, but imagine that person actually being able to predict His own resurrection! If one were a fraud, He would know that three days after His death everyone would know He had been a fraud. Jesus made the prediction and fulfilled it. And the result was faith. We need to use this evidence to convince unbelievers and strengthen believers.

The passage also says that they believed Scripture. This may refer to the fact that they realized that the resurrection was the fulfillment of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). Or it may mean simply that they believed the many prophecies that He fulfilled and that convinced them of who He is.

2:23 - Jesus did many signs during the Passover

Following this at the feast, Jesus did miracles. This, as always, validated His claims to be from God. People had questioned His authority and had demanded that He do signs (v18). He did not then accommodate them, knowing their hearts. But He did do miracles later even at that very feast. As a result, some came to believe in Him. That was the purpose of miracles. All doubt about who He was should have been removed when they saw His miracles. The miracles confirmed the message preached (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; etc.; see notes above on turning water to wine).

Unlike modern so-called faith healers, Jesus did not refuse to do miracles in the presence of unbelievers. On the contrary, as long as there were sincere people present who were seeking for truth, He did signs for the express purpose of giving them reason to believe.

2:24,25 - Jesus knew the very thoughts of men

Although people believed in Him, Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He had power to know the inner man. He could tell the thoughts, intents, and character of a person without anyone have to do or say anything to reveal this.

Apparently, He knew that, though the people had a measure of faith, yet they really did not understand His real intent and purpose. Subsequent events proved that many of these people forsook Him (Chap. 6), and none stood with Him to the end. In His time of greatest need, one of His own disciples betrayed Him, and another denied Him three times.

We are not told exactly in what sense He did not trust them. Apparently, it includes the fact that He did not tell them precisely all His

plans and purposes, but developed this gradually as the people gained understanding. Perhaps it also means that He would not allow them to take Him and make Him king (as some soon wanted - see chap. 6).

Note that this ability to know the hearts of men is a power uniquely belonging to God (1 Kings 8:39). Man cannot know this (1 Cor. 2:11). Yet Jesus often demonstrated this ability (John 1:42,47,48; 3:3; 4:29; 6:61; 11:4,14; 13:11; 21:17; etc.). This is a great sign cited by John to show Jesus' Deity, validating His claims. While apostles and others duplicated many of Jesus' signs, this one was rarely if ever accomplished by prophets, and never to the extent Jesus could do it.

The passage says Jesus knew "**all** men." Even if other prophets may have at times known something of men's thoughts, none of them know the hearts of **all** men. This is a unique characteristic of Deity: no one but God can do this. Yet Jesus possessed this characteristic. Here is a solid proof that John is claiming Deity for Jesus.

And note that Jesus possessed this unique power of Deity and exercised it even while He was alive on earth. Those who claim that Jesus surrendered or emptied Himself of the powers of Deity while He was on earth are greatly mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures. Yes, He exercised some limits on some of His powers in order to accomplish His purposes. But He never lost or surrendered those. God cannot, would not, and did not give up the powers of God.

John 3

Chap. 3 - Discussion with Nicodemus and John's Further Testi- mony

3:1-21 - Discussion with Nicodemus Regarding the New Birth

3:1 - Nicodemus

Around this time, Jesus had a discussion with a man named Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews.

The Pharisees were the sect that prided themselves on strict defense and practice of the law. In reality, they often followed their own manmade traditions rather than or in addition to the law (see on Matt. 15:1ff). And their "obedience" was often an outward ritual, lacking any inward sincerity or genuine concern about God and their relationship to Him. In short, Jesus often convicted them of hypocrisy, because their "righteousness" was an outward appearance before men without proper attitude toward God or others (Matt. 23). Nicodemus, however, appears to have been more sincere than most of the others.

John 7:50-52 later says Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish council (Sanhedrin) – this was probably the sense in which he was a "ruler." As such, he tried to get the council to give Jesus a fair hearing. John 19:38-42 says he was one who helped prepare Jesus' body for burial. Clearly, he became a disciple of Jesus at some point.

3:2 - Nicodemus acknowledges Jesus' miracles

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, though we are not told the reason why he chose at this time. Some speculate that his prominent position made him hesitant to be identified with Jesus, at least until he had more proof.

He called Jesus "Rabbi" and said people knew Jesus was a teacher from God, because no one could do signs like Jesus did unless God was with Him. Perhaps he was among those in 2:23 who had witnessed Jesus' miracles at the feast. In any case, he knew of the miracles and had reached the conclusion that the miracles proved Jesus was from God.

This is the correct understanding of the purpose of miracles: they demonstrated that the man, through whom they were done, was a man from God. They were an indication of God's approval or confirmation of the man's teachings and claims. Note that Jesus never rebuked

Nicodemus for this statement, though He rebuked him for several other misunderstandings as the discussion proceeded. John no doubt includes this statement because it helps confirm the theme of His message regarding who Jesus is. See notes on 2:1-11 for a further discussion of the purpose of miracles.

It is not clear how well Nicodemus understood Jesus' purpose and teachings at this point, yet he did know that Jesus was from God. He calls Him "Rabbi" and a teacher from God, but does not yet appear willing to confess Him as the Christ or the Son of God.

3:3 - Jesus begins a discussion of the new birth

John does not record any specific response Jesus gave to the claim that He was a teacher come from God. Instead, if Nicodemus accepted Him as a teacher, then Jesus would proceed to the next step and give him the teaching that he needed to hear.

So Jesus said that no one could see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. He emphasized the significance of this truth by saying, "most assuredly" (NKJV) or "verily, verily." Subsequent discussion shows this new birth was the spiritual rebirth by which one becomes a child of God, a member of Jesus' kingdom, the church (see notes on v5).

Note that this new birth is so essential that one cannot receive eternal life without it. The expression implies a new relationship with God by becoming one of His children. Then it implies a complete re-making of the person so that he puts off the old man and puts on the new man (Col. 3). Note that John had introduced this concept in 1:12,13 (see notes there).

3:4 - Nicodemus expresses confusion

Nicodemus then asked how a person could be born again when he had already been born. Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born?

No doubt Jesus' statement was especially shocking to Nicodemus. Like other Jews, he thought one deserved to be part of God's kingdom simply because he was born a descendant of Jacob – an Israelite. Physical birth was what mattered. Nicodemus especially had high position as a ruler, Pharisee, and teacher (v10). He surely thought that he, of all people, did not need any new kind of birth. Surely, he did not need to go back and start over in his relationship to God like other people who were not even trying to serve Him. But Jesus shocked him by saying that no one could enter the kingdom without an entirely new birth. Nicodemus needed this as surely as did anyone else.

Note once again how Jesus' hearer misunderstood His statements, because he took Jesus' spiritual statements in a physical way (see notes on 2:19,20). It is not always easy, when reading Jesus' statements, to

know which way He intended the statement to be taken, but we need to take care we do not err as Nicodemus did.

Note in particular that it was Nicodemus, not Jesus, who introduced into the discussion the concept of the **physical** birth, and he did it in **error**. Jesus made no references to physical birth when He brought up the new birth.

3:5 - Born of the water and the Spirit

To help Nicodemus see the point, Jesus explained what the new birth of v3 involves, so he would realize it was not physical birth Jesus was discussing. Note the parallel between v3 and v5:

V3	V5
Most assuredly	Most assuredly
I say to you	I say to you
unless one	unless one
is born again	is born of water and the Spirit
he cannot see	he cannot enter
the kingdom of God	the kingdom of God

Obviously, v3 and v5 are exactly parallel. Jesus is restating His point so Nicodemus can understand what He meant the first time. The restatement shows that “born again” means “born of water and the Spirit.” V5 is not describing two different births, as many people claim. It is describing further the new birth, stating that the new birth involves two elements — water and Spirit.

Other important passages regarding the new birth help us understand this one. One can only be born again by obeying the gospel — 1 Peter 1:22-25. Hearing and believing give one the right to become a child of God, but they do not automatically make one a child of God — John 1:12. To be born again, one must come into Christ — 2 Cor. 5:17. To come into Christ and thereby become a child of God, one who believes must be baptized — Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:26,27 (see also Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

What is the “water”?

“Born of the water” must refer to water baptism because: (1) Baptism is the only command in the New Testament that requires the use of water (Acts 8:35-39; 10:47; John 3:23; Heb. 10:22; etc.). (2) Many other passages, already cited, show that water baptism is essential to forgiveness. (3) Further, other passages, already cited, show specifically that water baptism is an essential element of the new birth. (4) We will also notice later several verses that tie baptism to hearing the gospel like John 3:5 does.

Some people claim the water of John 3:5 refers to the physical birth (the “water” surrounding the baby in the mother’s womb). However, (1) the parallel to v3 (above) shows that v5 is not talking about two separate births nor about physical birth at all. It is explaining two

elements involved in one birth, the new birth. (2) “Water” is nowhere in the New Testament used to refer to physical birth. (3) V6 refers to physical birth as born of the “flesh.” If he meant physical birth in v5, why say “water” in v5 and then say “flesh” in v6? Why not use the same term both times if He meant the same thing?

(4) Physical birth is mentioned in John 3; but it was Nicodemus, not Jesus, who brought it up as a result of his confusion and misunderstanding (v4). Jesus restated the truth about the new birth (v5), then He contrasted the physical birth to the new in v6. But He never included physical birth, along with the new birth, as something essential to enter the kingdom in v5. He discussed physical birth only to correct the confusion Nicodemus had introduced.

So, Jesus here emphatically stated that baptism is essential to enter the kingdom of God. No one can be born again without it. When people seek to deny that Jesus ever taught the necessity of baptism to salvation, they need to consider carefully this passage along with Mark 16:16 and the other passages cited above.

For further discussion of the purpose of baptism and the need for obedience, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

What is the “Spirit”?

The Holy Spirit revealed the message of the gospel, which one must learn and believe in order to be forgiven. The word is the “seed” by which one is born again (1 Peter 1:23; etc.). The word is the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). It is the tool or means used by the Spirit to accomplish His word in conversion (2 Peter 1:21; Eph. 3:3-5; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; etc.).

To be born of water and the Spirit means to learn the gospel message revealed by the Spirit, believe it, and obey it in baptism. This same exact connection is made between the word of the Spirit and water baptism in several other passages about conversion. Compare John 3:5 to Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:35-39; 16:32,33; 18:8; Eph. 5:26.

3:6,7 - Spiritual birth contrasted to physical birth

After restating the necessity of the new birth in v5, Jesus clearly stated in v6 that He was not talking about physical birth, as Nicodemus thought. He is discussing a completely different kind of birth — a birth of the Spirit. Again, Nicodemus, not Jesus, had introduced the topic of physical birth. Jesus discussed it here only to correct the misunderstanding. The spiritual birth does not include the physical birth, but is contrasted to it. It consists of two elements: water and Spirit.

Note that Jesus refers to the physical birth as birth of the “flesh,” not of the “water.” If “water” in v5 refers to the physical birth, why did Jesus refer to it as “water” in v5 and “flesh” in v6? Why not use the same term both times?

Since Jesus was discussing a spiritual birth, not a fleshly one, then it is possible to undergo both. Nicodemus should not be amazed and confused by Jesus' statement because, when He spoke of being "born again," Jesus was not talking about a physical birth.

3:8 - The wind blows where it will

This is a difficult verse. Calvinists and others say it means that the Spirit comes unnoticed to work on the heart of a sinner and save Him directly apart from the word. This is impossible because it contradicts such passages as the following:

Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16).

We are born again by the gospel (1 Pet. 1:23).

No one can come to Jesus except by hearing, learning, and being taught (John 6:44,45).

We are brought forth (born again) by the word of truth (James 1:18).

The key to the meaning is found in the expression "hear the sound." People cannot tell where the wind comes from and cannot control where it goes, yet they hear the sound it makes. So, they cannot see or understand how the Spirit worked in revealing God's inspired message to men. Yet they can hear the message He revealed in the word. This is how people are born again — not by direct action of the Spirit without the word, but by the medium of the word — the "sound" which they hear from the Spirit. When they hear the "sound," they know what to do to be saved. (Cf. passages above plus Mark 16:15,16; Acts 11:14; 19:5.)

So the point is that we do not need to understand how the Spirit does His work to know that our responsibility is to listen to the message He reveals and obey it. The same principle applies to the Father and the Son in their work. We do not need to understand all about the infinite God to obey His revealed will for us. So, people today are born again when they study and obey the message the Spirit reveals in the gospel.

["Wind blows" can be translated "Spirit breathes" — ASV footnote; compare Johnson, McGarvey.]

3:9,10 - Jesus rebukes Nicodemus' confusion

Nicodemus indicated he just did not understand Jesus' point. Jesus in turn expressed dismay that one could fail to understand these things and yet claim to be a teacher of God's own people, Israel.

It is likewise amazing today that people can claim to be preachers in "Christian" denominations - even in the Lord's church - and yet fail to understand things they clearly ought to understand (1 Tim. 1:7). Amazingly, some do not even understand that Jesus was saying in this very passage that baptism is essential to salvation.

But don't be shocked. There has been such ignorance in Jesus' day and it will always be so. So, we should not be surprised when people continue even today to reject the message Jesus revealed.

3:11,12 - Jesus realized people would misunderstand His teachings

Jesus had spoken of things that He had personally witnessed and knew to be right, because He came down from heaven (v13). Yet, the people did not accept His teachings as true. He had knowledge and authority others could not possess, yet people still questioned the truth of His statements as if they somehow knew more.

There were other things, even more difficult than these, that He could reveal in His wisdom. He had told them things pertaining to their lives and what God expects of people here. He knew enough that He could have told about heaven and what happens there (v13). But if people like Nicodemus were confused about what He had said pertaining to how to even become a child of God, how could they possibly understand if He told them about more complicated things in heaven?

3:13 - Jesus claims to have come from heaven

Jesus had been in heaven and had descended to earth in the form of a man (see on John 1:1-18; cf. 6:38; 3:31; Phil. 2:5-8). None of the people He was teaching had ever ascended to heaven. They had no first-hand knowledge of what was there. Yet they presumed to disbelieve what was told them by the only One who had been there and come to tell them about it.

“Who is in heaven” — There are different senses in which one (especially One who possesses Deity) can be said to be in a place. In the primary sense, God's presence is in heaven (Matt. 6:9; 5:16). Yet, in another sense God is everywhere, seeing and hearing all we do (Psa. 139:7-12; etc.). And in another sense, He is with His people in the sense of spiritual fellowship such that He is with them and dwelling in them wherever they are (Matt. 28:20; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; John 17:20,21; etc.).

So Jesus, in personal presence, was on earth. Yet He had a unique fellowship with Father. This is expressed as being “in” one another (John 17:20,21; 8:29). In no sense were they the same individual.

The Father is personally in heaven, yet “in” Jesus and in His people as fellowship with them. So Jesus was personally on earth, but He was “in heaven” in the sense of fellowship and harmony with all that happened there. The verse may involve more than this, but surely this much is true.

And note that this is clearly a claim that Jesus was more than just a man. He claimed to have been in heaven with God and to have come down from heaven. No mere man could make such a claim. Those who

deny that Jesus believed and taught that He was Deity need to reckon with such passages as this.

3:14,15 - Jesus would be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness

The discussion then passes to other aspects of salvation and Jesus' role in it. It appears that Jesus is still talking, but it could be John is just explaining things Jesus said.

Jesus would be lifted up like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. This refers to an event recorded in Num. 21:9. The people had sinned and God sent serpents to bite and kill them. To save the people, Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole so the people could look at it and be healed.

The point of the comparison is that Jesus would also be lifted up when He died on the cross (cf. 8:28; 12:32,34). As a result, people who are suffering the guilt of sin can be healed by having their sins forgiven through Him. They can have eternal life, but to do so they must believe in Him (see notes on next verse).

Note that, once again, even very early in His public ministry, Jesus was plainly predicting His death (cf. 2:19-22). Jesus did not, as some claim, come to earth expecting to establish an earthly kingdom. He knew all along, even from the beginning of His preaching, that He must be "lifted up."

And notice further His clear claim that He would be the Savior of all men, just like the serpent was the means of salvation to the Israelites. And further, whoever believes in Him would receive eternal life! Imagine a mere human making such amazing claims, even if he were a prophet. Jesus is claiming from the beginning of His preaching, that He could save men from sin so they could receive eternal life. Who but the sinless Son of God would dare make such claims? And who can read these statements and still believe that Jesus did not know He was, not just a man, but the Divine Savior of the world?

3:16 - God's love led to the sacrifice of Jesus

This is a beautiful summary of God's plan for saving man through Jesus. Yet many people misunderstand it.

Men ought to perish eternally because of sin (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20; 2 Thess. 1:8,9; John 8:24). Instead of eternal death, God desires to offer us eternal life (Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:11,12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Matt. 25:46). To make this possible, Jesus had to die on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. Though He was innocent of sin, He was punished so we who are guilty may go free (1 Peter 2:24; Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21). That God was willing to send His Son to die under these circumstances proves God's great love for us (Rom. 5:6-9; 1 John 4:9-14).

God's gift was given to offer salvation to the whole "world" — "whoever." The Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement — that Christ

died just for a few who were unconditionally elected regardless of their character, will, or conduct – is refuted in this fundamental gospel passage. But other passages likewise show that Jesus died to offer salvation to all: cf. 1 Tim. 2:4,6; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:1,2; Titus 2:11-13.

People must believe to be saved.

But there are conditions each individual must meet in order to receive this salvation that God offers. Here these conditions are summarized under the term “believe” on him. Clearly each person must understand and accept the truth of God’s word about who Jesus is and what He did to save us (cf. John 8:24; Mark 16:15,16; etc.).

Some people think believing simply means having a conviction in ones heart about Jesus, and that is all that is necessary for one to be saved. In particular, it is taught that obedience – outward acts of service, and especially baptism – are not necessary. Sinners are sometimes told that everything they need to know to be saved is found in this one verse and nothing else is needed. However:

(1) We must take all of God’s word and follow it all (Acts 3:22,23; Matt. 4:7; 28:20; James 2:10; John 15:14). Why was the rest of the Bible written if John 3:16 is all we need?

(2) The Bible contains express examples of people who had mental conviction about who Jesus was, but they were not saved – James 2:19; John 12:41,42.

(3) Other passages say there are other things we must do to be saved besides just have a conviction in our hearts. We must repent (Acts 17:30; 2:38; 2 Peter 3:9; Luke 24:49), confess (Rom. 10:9,10; Matt. 10:32,32), and be baptized (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:26,27; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.).

(4) If people conclude that baptism is not necessary because it is not mentioned in John 3:16, then what about repentance and confession, since they also are not mentioned? And what about passages that list conditions for salvation but do not mention faith as a necessary condition – do they likewise prove that faith is not necessary to salvation? If it be argued that repentance and confession are included in believing, we ask how one can know that, since John 3:16 does not mention them. It can only be answered that other passages show they are necessary. But that proves other passages are necessary, so John 3:16 alone is not enough. You must get other details elsewhere, and whatever means you use to show that repentance and confession are necessary, the same approach will show that baptism is necessary according to other verses.

(5) The truth is that the word “faith” or “believing” is used in different ways in the Bible. There are different kinds of faith, some of which save and some of which do not. The faith that does not include obedience is faith that will not save. The faith that saves is faith that includes obedience: Heb. 10:39 & chap. 11; Gal. 5:6; James 2:14-26; Col.

2:12-14. According to the verses already listed, this includes baptism as surely as it does repentance and confession. “Believe,” as used here, is a summary term including all of man’s response to the gospel. See on 3:36 for a verse that demonstrates this connection. The details regarding what is required are spelled out elsewhere.

For further discussion of salvation by “faith only” vs. obedient faith, the purpose of baptism and the importance of obedience, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

3:17,18 - Jesus came to save, not to condemn

Jesus was sent into the world by God as the means of saving the world, not of condemning the world. The world was already condemned by sin (see notes on vv 19-21; cf. Rom. 6:23; 3:23). Jesus came into the world to provide a means by which sinners could escape the condemnation brought upon themselves by their sins.

One who believes in Jesus can escape condemnation by being forgiven of sin (remember, this is obedient faith as described in v16 - see notes there). But one who does not believe stands condemned already, because he is guilty of sins; but he cannot receive the solution to sin, because that solution comes only through faith in Jesus, and he does not believe in Jesus.

One is condemned “because he does not believe,” but not in the sense that his lack of faith is what caused him to stand condemned in the first place. If someone thought that a man stood acceptable before God, but then came into a condemned state because he refused to believe in Jesus, that would mean that Jesus’ coming into the world did lead to its condemnation — the very thing this passage denies.

On the contrary, because of sin men stood condemned already, before Jesus ever came into the world. This is what the Old Testament proved repeatedly (Romans 3:19,20; Galatians 3:10,11,22). The sacrifice of Jesus is what offers forgiveness, but one must believe in order to receive forgiveness. If one does not believe, he remains in his sins, and hence stands condemned “because he does not believe.”

So, each man ultimately stands condemned by his own fault. He sinned because he chose to give in to temptation – God did not make him do this – James 1:13-15. Even so, he could be saved if he would choose to respond to the gospel message and believe in Jesus. If he does not do so, he ultimately has no one to blame for his condemnation but himself. He surely cannot justifiably condemn God, who has done infinitely more to make salvation possible than man deserves.

Jesus did not come to condemn the world the **first** time He came – i.e., when He came born of the virgin Mary. That time He came so He could die to become our Savior. But He will come a second time, and that time He will be our judge and will condemn the world and all unforgiven sinners to eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46).

3:19 - Men are condemned because they prefer darkness to light

Again, as in vv 17,18, men are condemned, but the condemnation is caused by their sinful deeds — they are practicing evil (see also v20). They stay in condemnation because, even though Jesus brought light (truth and salvation — 1:4; 8:12; etc.) into the world, yet the men prefer to stay in darkness. They do not come to Jesus the light to have their sins removed.

3:20,21 - Sin hates the light

People who are practicing sin do not want to come to the light (usually) because they don't like to have their sins exposed or revealed. When people are in sin and are not willing to change and do what is right, they become uncomfortable when their sinful deeds are exposed. Some commit sins in private, because they don't want anyone to even know what they are doing. Others don't mind having people know what they do, so long as those people act as though the conduct is acceptable, rather than rebuking it. In any case, people don't want to have it made clear that they are guilty of sin and that their sins are as repulsive and evil as the Bible says they are.

This is a general statement of truth. Of course, other Scriptures show that there are some sinners who hate their sins and want to learn the solution to their sins. They are glad to come to the light, so they can be forgiven. And there are sincere people, who are in sin but do not realize it. They are willing to come to the light, not realizing that it will rebuke them. But if they are truly committed to what is right, they will repent when they learn the truth. Otherwise, they will no longer want to come to the light, as the passage describes.

On the other hand, a person who is doing right does not mind hearing what the Bible says about right and wrong, because he knows he is doing what pleases God. He has nothing to fear from examination of God's word, because the word does not condemn him. And if he should find that he is wrong on some point, he is still glad to have heard what the word says because now he can correct himself.

Examples of people who hate the light

This explains many things that sinful people do. Most are “not interested” in coming to church meetings, nor will they participate in a home Bible study. They “don't want to talk about religion,” because they are afraid their sins will be exposed. Many of them don't even want to be around Christians, especially those known for zealously speaking about the gospel. Some even persecute Christians and try to get them to quit preaching the truth, because the preaching condemns sin and the people don't want to hear it. This also explains why many members of the church quit attending when they become involved in

sin — they are too embarrassed to come to services and hear their sins rebuked.

Likewise, many religious people are willing to talk about religion, until they begin to see that Bible passages are being produced that condemn their own practices. Then they say things like, “I don’t believe in debating,” or “I don’t think it’s Christ-like to criticize other people’s beliefs.” In many cases they did not mind debating or criticizing until they were proved to be in error. In any case, the fear that they or their loved ones will be proved wrong is generally what leads people to be unwilling to discuss religion.

But truth has nothing to fear from investigation. So, an honest person, who has the truth or sincerely wants the truth, will be willing to participate in fair and honest discussions of God’s word.

3:22-36 - Further Testimony from John the Baptist

3:22-24 - Jesus baptizes in Judea

Sometime after his discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus came into the land of Judea with His disciples. He stayed there a while baptizing people (though we learn later that it was actually Jesus’ disciples, not Jesus Himself, who personally did the baptizing — 4:2).

We are not told the purpose of Jesus’ baptizing people at this time, except that it had to do with making disciples (4:1). The baptism evidently dedicated them to be His disciples. We are not told whether or not it was for the remission of sins. Nor do we know whether or not these people had to be re-baptized after His resurrection. We do not need this information, since we cannot receive this baptism anyway. It was clearly not a baptism into Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, as is the baptism of the gospel (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12). Other passages tell us what we need to know about the baptism that we need to receive today — that is what is important to us. But we do not need to understand all about this baptism that Jesus practiced, so the details are not revealed.

John’s baptism required much water.

John was also baptizing at this time in a place called Aenon near Salim. The exact location of this place is uncertain (consult a Bible dictionary or Bible atlas). Just as there are unrevealed details about the baptism Jesus performed, so there are questions we have difficulty answering about John’s baptism, since it too is no longer being practiced (cf. Acts 19:1ff).

But we are given information that helps us understand the physical action involved in baptism. We are told that John chose the place he did “because there was much water there.” If baptism is a sprinkling or pouring, as many believe, why would John need “much water,” and why deliberately choose the place he did so he would have “much wa-

ter” available? Sprinkling and pouring do not require much water at all. But immersion requires “much water.” This helps confirm what we learn from other passages and from the original meaning of the word “baptize.” Baptism is immersion, not sprinkling or pouring (see Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12; Acts 8:36-39; Mark 1:9,10).

At this point, John had not yet been imprisoned. Later he was imprisoned by Herod and eventually beheaded (Matt. 14:1ff).

For a detailed discussion about the action of baptism – sprinkling, pouring, or immersion - see our article about this on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

3:25-26 - John’s disciples question him about Jesus’ popularity

John’s disciples then had a disputation with some Jews about purification. We are not told exactly what the dispute was about because, again, we do not need to know the specifics. The writer is telling the story simply to bring out John the Baptist’s further testimony about Jesus. It is likely that the discussion of purification was related to the purpose of baptism. Both John and Jesus were baptizing people, so the discussion of purification led to a question about Jesus’ baptizing people.

Chapter 1 contains a lengthy record about John’s testimony regarding Jesus (see notes on 1:19-36). John’s disciples remembered that discussion and realized that Jesus was the one about whom John had testified when he was beyond the Jordan. But they now said that Jesus was baptizing people too, and many people (they exaggerate saying “all”) were coming to Him to be baptized. 4:1 adds that Jesus was making more disciples than John was. Apparently, these disciples were concerned for John’s sake, probably even jealous that John was losing disciples to Jesus.

3:27,28 - John repeats his testimony regarding Jesus

John responded by repeating His testimony about Jesus, showing his own secondary position, and reminding the disciples that this is the way he had described it from the beginning. He had denied being the Christ (1:20), but said he had been sent before Jesus to prepare the way for Him. Why then should he object if Jesus was making disciples. And if they were truly John’s disciples, they should have believed what he told them, in which case they should not object if Jesus made disciples.

John said a man can truly receive nothing unless it is given to Him from heaven. Obviously, he is referring to ministry in service to God. A true ministry must come from God in order to be valid. (A person can, of course, **claim** to have something, even though God never really gave it. But despite the claim, he does not really **have** it.)

The application here is to both Jesus and John. John had what God had given him; he received nothing more and should claim nothing more. He can receive nothing unless God gave it. God gave John a limited ministry: to prepare the way for Jesus. So He should not attempt to take for himself something that God never intended to give him. On the other hand, Jesus had what was also given by God; so no one should attempt to deny it or take away from it. The application is that, what was happening was exactly what God willed and what John had said would happen. So, his disciples should not have been upset or jealous.

3:29,30 - The illustration of the bridegroom

John used a simple illustration of his point. The one who marries the bride in a wedding ceremony is the bridegroom. The bride does not belong to the groom's best man nor to any of his friends. The friends all have positions that are secondary to that of the groom. Should the friends be jealous because of that? Not if they really care for the groom. A true friend of the groom rejoices because of the joy of his friend. His joy is fulfilled in seeing his friend blessed. To do otherwise would be selfish and self-centered. It would be an attempt to take what did not rightfully belong to oneself.

John was saying that, in the same way, he rejoiced in Jesus' success. This was actually the purpose of his work — to increase Jesus' acceptance and to encourage people to follow Him. He was not sad but happy when people followed Jesus, because this showed that his own mission was being fulfilled. His following would decrease while that of Jesus would increase. This is the way God wanted it to be, so it was the way John wanted it to be.

Note that today there are some people who, like these disciples of John, want to cling to the name of John the Baptist, claim to receive the baptism he administered, and/or claim they are members of the church he began. They need to realize that they are seeking a greater preeminence for John than God intended or than John himself intended.

Such people may claim they are also disciples of Jesus; but if they understood John's purpose, they would instead name themselves after the One John prepared the way for and seek to be members of His church. John sought to honor Jesus, not himself. Why settle for identifying yourself with the forerunner? Why not identify instead with the One who is the Savior and the One who had the preeminence? Why seek to be part of a group that, by the statement of the leader himself, is supposed to dwindle? Why not rather identify yourself as a follower and member of the church belonging to the One whose following John himself tried to increase?

3:31-33 - He who comes from above

Further information is given here about Jesus' work, and especially about His authority and why we should believe in Him. It is unclear to me who is speaking here. The NKJV translators appear to believe it is still John the Baptist, so they continue the quotation marks as in the previous verses. However, it seems just as likely that these are the author John's inspired comments on the story. In either case, of course, the message is inspired truth from God.

People who are from the earth can only speak about things they have learned on earth - earthly knowledge. We cannot speak with assurance about things in heaven, since we have never been there. We have seen only the earth, so that is all we can testify about. But One who had been in heaven could testify with authority about what is there. Only Jesus can do that.

Because He is from heaven, Jesus is "above all." This coincides with John 1:1, etc. He was God from the beginning, the Creator, etc. He has authority over all - i.e., over all created things. Jesus rules over all by right of ownership. He owns all by right of being Creator of all. See also Matthew 28:18; Philippians 3:20,21; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 17:14; 19:16; John 3:31; Romans 9:5; Acts 10:36; Romans 10:12; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:21; John 16:15; 17:10.

Being from heaven, Jesus can testify with authority about heaven and what the will of the Father is (see v13). Yet despite this authority, people in general did not accept His testimony as true. No one else can speak with first-hand experience about heaven, yet people reject the testimony of the only one who can speak with authority! (Note the verse says "no one" receives His testimony, but this is an obvious hyperbole - the very next verse speaks of those who did receive Him.)

If however, a person does accept and believe Jesus' testimony to be true, then that person is putting his seal, certification, or stamp of approval on God's promises as being true (cf. certify or "seal" in John 6:27; Romans 4:11; 15:28; 1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13). To disbelieve is to claim that Jesus' statements are not true or not from God. To believe them is to confess or confirm that they are from God. This, of course, requires us to respond by obedience.

3:34,35 - Jesus speaks for God by the power of the Spirit

Jesus, being from heaven sent from God, being over all, and Himself possessing Deity, speaks the words of God. That is why men ought to hear His words. Here is another clear affirmation by John that Jesus was from God and spoke for God - see on 1:17,18.

Another reason Jesus had the right to speak God's words is that He did not have the Spirit by measure - i.e., He had it without measure. When He spoke God's word, He spoke from personal knowledge, He spoke with authority because He is over all, and He spoke with

measureless guidance from the Holy Spirit. Hence, all He said must be true and ought to be accepted.

It is not completely clear in what sense Jesus was guided by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided apostles and prophets, because they would have no other way of directly knowing God's will. But their knowledge was limited to whatever the Spirit chose to reveal. Jesus had unlimited guidance of the Spirit; but since He was from heaven, why would He need it? Obviously, the Beings of Deity are always able to communicate with one another without limitation, so perhaps this was just a way of expressing the fact that Jesus on earth had unlimited communication with the Spirit. But the relationship among unlimited, infinite Beings must also remain to some extent beyond human ability to understand.

Further, the Son was able to speak God's word authoritatively, because the Father has put all things in His hand (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is not a mere man or on a level with any man. The Father has exalted Him to a position such that everything is in His power. So clearly we must believe and respect the authority of all that He says as being the Word of God. See under v31 for other references showing the exalted position of Jesus over all.

The point is surely that Jesus is so great – so much greater even than John the Baptist – that we must surely not begrudge the honor and following He receives (as some of John's followers were doing – v26). But it appears that the author uses this as an opportunity to discuss in general Jesus' greatness and His exalted position. He has all authority, is over all, and so must be believed and obeyed. This is the exact application made in the next verse.

3:36 - Faith leads to eternal life, unbelief leads to wrath

Since Jesus speaks for God as in vv 31-35, faith in Jesus is essential to please God. We must believe He is all that the Bible claims Him to be, and we must believe His message and accept it as absolute truth.

If we have this faith, we have everlasting life. But if we do not believe (or do not obey – ASV), we will not see life but will abide under the wrath of God. Like v16, this confirms the absolute necessity of faith to please God (see on v16 and cf. Heb. 11:6; John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9,10; etc.). Again, the faith here is comprehensive, saving faith, and that includes obedience (see notes on v16). Interestingly, the ASV even translates this verse in such a way as to demonstrate the true faith includes and requires obedience, exactly as we have explained on v16.

This is both a great promise and a great warning. There is a great blessing to those who choose to believe and a great warning to those who do not.

Does this teach “once saved, always saved”?

Some say we “have” eternal life because we believe, but if we already “have” it, then we cannot be lost. Therefore “once saved, always saved” - one who has believed can never afterwards become lost. But we “have” everlasting life now in the sense of a conditional promise or hope, not as an immutable possession (see 1 John 2:25; James 1:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 Peter 1:3,4; etc.). We receive eternal life as an actual possession only after this life is over (Luke 18:30; Rom. 2:5-7; Rev. 2:10).

Furthermore, the verse itself states a condition one must meet to have eternal life — he must believe. But it is possible for the believer to cease believing and become an unbeliever (Heb. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 5:8). If a believer ceases to believe, will he still be saved? The last part of this verse itself answers: it says the unbeliever does not have life but will receive God’s wrath. Hence, the passage itself shows that conditions must be met for one to receive eternal life in the judgment, and that one will be lost if he ceases meeting the conditions.

Further, if the first part of the verse teaches “once saved, always saved,” why doesn’t the last part teach “once lost, always lost”? It says the one who does not believe will not see life but abides under God’s wrath. If the first part is immutable and unconditional, why not also the last part? Hence, anyone who ever disbelieves is lost and can never be saved! On the other hand, if the state of the unbeliever in the last part of the verse can change by becoming a believer, then in the same way the state of the believer in the first part of the verse will change if he ceases to believe. And remember that believing here includes obedience.

Finally, there are many other verses that show a saved person can so sin as to become lost. Verses like v36 should never be so viewed as to contradict other verses that plainly teach that a child of God may so sin as to be lost. See John 15:1-6; Acts 8:12-24; Romans 6:12-18; 8:12-17; Galatians 5:1-4; 6:7-9; 1 Corinthians 9:25-10:12; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22.

For further discussion of the security of the believer and “once saved, always saved,” see our articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

John 4

Chap. 4 - Jesus in Samaria and the Healing of the Nobleman's Son

4:1-42 - Jesus in Samaria

4:1-3 - Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee

Jesus realized that the Pharisees were aware of His increasing popularity: He was in fact making more disciples than John. So, he left Judea, where the events in the last part of chapter 3 had occurred (cf. 3:22,23), and went back to Galilee. The exact connection here is not stated. The Pharisees were intensely jealous of anyone besides themselves who obtained a following (Matt. 27:18). Jesus knew that confrontation with them was inevitable, but the time had not yet come for Him to die. So maybe He left the area so He would have time to accomplish more teaching before His confrontation with the Jewish leaders would lead to His death.

Some commentators point out that it was about this time that John was arrested by Herod and imprisoned (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19,20; cf. John 3:24). Herod ruled in Galilee (Luke 3:1; 23:5-12; 13:31; Matt. 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9), so Jesus went to the jurisdiction ruled by the very king who had imprisoned and killed John. Perhaps He intended there to strengthen and encourage those disciples who would have been distressed by John's arrest. But this would have no connection to the fact the Pharisees heard about the number of disciples He was making.

In any case, it is clear that Jesus did not leave Judea because of any lack of favorable response to His message. He was making many disciples, even more so than John was. Even so, He apparently thought there were even more important reasons for Him to return to Galilee.

The connection between baptism and becoming a disciple

We are told that Jesus was making and baptizing disciples (see notes on 3:22,26,30, where we are first told the Jesus was baptizing people). This shows that baptism was a prerequisite to becoming a disciple — a prerequisite or initiation into discipleship. Other than that, we are not told the purpose of it. But this implies that, even at this early point, one who had not been baptized would not fully be a disciple.

However, we are told that the actual baptizing was done, not by Jesus Himself, but by His disciples. This illustrates the principle of working through agents. Jesus authorized the baptism, but others did it by His authority (cf. Luke 10:16; 16:29; John 14:9; Matt. 25:34-45; 26:26-28). When a person authorizes someone else to act in his behalf, then the one who authorized the act is responsible for it the same as if he himself had done it. This is also true in law, as when one hires someone else to commit murder, etc. (1 Kings 21:19). Under the gospel, Christians are authorized to baptize in Jesus' name (or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; etc.). When we do, it is Jesus' baptism just the same as if He Himself had done it.

Note also that the emphasis in baptism is not on the one who physically performs the act. If it was important who did the act, surely it would have been preferred for Jesus Himself to do it. This is not to imply that baptism is not important or that the purpose does not matter. On the contrary, the point is to keep the focus on the purpose of the act and the commitment of the one being baptized to do the act properly. So Jesus allowed, and perhaps even encouraged, other people to do the physical act. This shows that it does not matter who does the act, and it prevents people from seeking prominence on the basis of who performed their baptism. See also 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, where Paul explains that this same principle applied to his work. He too emphasized the work of teaching but then allowed others to do the physical act of baptizing the converts. That way no one would become proud or divisive on the basis of what preacher baptized them.

4:4-6 - Jesus traveled through Samaria

When traveling from Judea to Galilee, many Jews crossed the Jordan and went around Samaria because of their hatred for Samaritans (v9). But it was quicker and shorter to go through Samaria, so for some reason Jesus decided that He needed to go the quicker route (v4).

He came to the Samaritan city called Sychar, which was located near Mt. Gerizim (see **map**). It was also near Shechem, where Jacob had purchased a plot of land (Genesis 33:19). We are told that Jacob had given a plot of land nearby to Joseph (perhaps referred to in Genesis 48:22).

Jacob's well

There was also a well there that was named for Jacob. This same well apparently exists today, since a well in this very area has been attributed throughout history as being the one that Jacob owned. It is about 8 feet across, but the depth has varied from time to time, as apparently people have thrown things in (cf. *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*).

Jesus was tired when He arrived at this well and sat down. It was about the sixth hour or 12:00 noon. He was alone at the time, because the disciples were in the city getting food (v8).

Note that fact Jesus was tired shows that He experienced the physical problems we do. He was truly a man as well as God. But He had a lengthy discussion here with a woman even though He was tired. This shows His zeal for teaching, which we ought to imitate.

4:7,8 - Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink

A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink. This may seem a simple request, but under the circumstances it was unusual (v9) and led to great events.

In teaching, we can often use small things if we watch for opportunities. Teaching does not require formal classrooms with pre-appointed times. Everyday conversations make some of the best times to teach, if we watch for opportunities to bring spiritual things into the conversation. Jesus was a master at doing this, and we would all do well to learn to imitate this ability.

We are told parenthetically that the disciples were not present because they had gone into the city to buy food. This explains why Jesus was alone when the woman came to the well and why the disciples came back later and wondered what had happened (v27).

4:9 - The woman raises the issue of the conflict between Jews and Samaritans

To us, Jesus' action may seem insignificant, but the woman realized that it was very unusual. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, in that they did not talk with them, eat with them, or visit socially with them. Also, men often did not speak to women in public places. Yet Jesus asked for a drink from this Samaritan woman. This led her to comment that his conduct was strange. It is not clear whether she spoke with resentment of Him as a Jew or with curiosity regarding His action.

This was basically a racial issue. The Samaritans were a mixed breed, having resulted from inter-marriage between Jews and other peoples. It seems likely that they were the descendants of the people whom the Assyrians imported into the land, when they deported many Israelites (see 2 Kings 17:21-24 & McGarvey's notes). Inter-marriage with Jews then produced the Samaritans. Jews did not associate with them, like they did not associate with Gentiles. Perhaps the law forbidding inter-marriage with people of the land also affected their attitude.

Nevertheless, the Samaritans claimed Jacob as their father (v12) and tried to worship God. But their worship was perverted. King Jeroboam had begun major perversions in the worship in this area, when he erected an altar to a golden calf at Bethel (1 Kings 12:25-33). The people the Assyrians brought in were taught about God, but worshiped

Him along with idols as though He was just another god (2 Kings 17:24-41). For this reason the Jews who returned from captivity were led by their rulers to refuse to allow these people to have part in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The people showed great animosity toward the Jews who returned (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah chap. 4&6).

Jesus' attitude toward the Samaritans, however, was the same as His attitude toward all sinners. He did not justify their sins, but He viewed them as souls needing salvation. He wanted to help them become pleasing to God. His salvation would be without respect of persons, regardless of nationality (Acts 10:34,35; Mark. 16:15,16; Matt. 28:18-20). Jewish traditions would not be allowed to hinder His efforts, so long as no law of God was violated.

Hence, Jesus spoke to the woman, resulting eventually in numerous people coming to believe in Him. Nevertheless, He instructed the disciples on the limited commission to avoid preaching to the Samaritans, apparently as a matter of priority and time limitations - Matt. 10:5. After His death as the gospel was being spread, the message was brought to Samaria, where many obeyed (Acts 1:8; 8:5-25). (Cf. Luke 17:11-19.) Note that we too should have a Scriptural love and care for people of all nationalities and races, desiring all to be saved.

Other references to Samaritans: 2 Kings 17:6,24-41; Luke 9:52-56; Luke 10:25-37.

4:10 - Jesus used the topic of water to stir the woman's interest

Jesus responded by ignoring the question the woman asked. As when He taught Nicodemus, Jesus began with a comparison without explaining it. The woman did not understand the point, but it drew her further into the discussion.

This is an interesting teaching technique. The subject the woman raised was not what she most needed to hear about. She had asked about racial issues. Jesus knew that what she really needed was to know ***who He is***, so He switched the topic. But He raised a new topic in a way that brought her interest to where He could teach her. He got her attention just by talking to her, then He increased it immeasurably by a challenging statement. These are teaching skills that all Christians need to develop.

He illustrated a need she had but was not aware of, by using the one thing they had in common. She came for water, and He had asked for water. So Jesus introduced her to another kind of water. He said that, if she knew who He was, she would have asked Him for a drink (instead of the other way around), and He would have given her living water.

Commentators discuss at length specifically what Jesus referred to as "the gift of God" and the "living water." The passage does not say, so I doubt it is essential for us to know. Whether these refer to Jesus

Himself, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, knowledge of truth, etc., the end result is the same. He could give her something even more essential to her soul than the physical water was to her physical life. Likely, He left the meaning vague, because the important point was to lead her to an interest in the spiritual blessings He could provide. His meaning could have included any or all of the above items.

Note that the very fact that Jesus tried to teach this woman shows that women are important to God. It also shows that He was concerned about individuals to the point He would take time, even when tired, to teach a single individual. Many people are willing to teach if they have large crowds. But some see little value in taking time to teach an individual. Jesus and His apostles showed us the importance of “personal evangelism” with Nicodemus, this Samaritan woman, and on other occasions.

Living water is also mentioned in 7:37f; Rev. 21:6; 22:1,17; 7:17.

4:11,12 - The woman is confused but continues the conversation

The woman showed her confusion, much like Nicodemus had. She thought He was talking physically when He was talking spiritually. And as with Nicodemus, her response showed her confusion. She asked what he had that He could use to draw water from a deep well.

Then she asked if He thought He was greater than Jacob who, with his family and animals, had drunk from the well? If Jacob needed a well and a vessel to get water, how could Jesus get water having nothing to draw with and no other apparent source? Doubtless, she thought He was not greater, but soon she realized that He was.

Note that Jesus and Jacob and Jacob’s sons had all drunk from this very well. What an interesting thought to drink from it today. Yet even more important would be for us to share in the living water that Jesus offered and have a relationship with God, just as surely as Jesus and Jacob did.

4:13,14 - Jesus’ water can lead to eternal life

Jesus explained further. His water was superior because, unlike the water she could provide to Him, His water could provide people eternal life so they would never thirst again. It is like a spring of water that provides continuing, unending satisfaction. His statement here showed conclusively that He referred, not to physical water, but to something spiritual. Only spiritual blessings could lead to eternal life.

Jesus’ living water is truly satisfying. But the needs it meets are spiritual — it gives eternal life. The illustration is that physical water is essential to physical life. But Jesus can give living water that provides eternal life. If He could provide this, then truly He would be greater than Jacob.

In giving this answer, Jesus expresses one of the fundamental weaknesses of everything physical: its value is temporary. He said that one who drinks of physical water will thirst again. The same is true of eating and all physical blessings. Having enjoyed them, we will desire them again. Nothing physical gives lasting, permanent satisfaction. Only in those things that lead to eternal life can we find lasting fulfillment. (Matthew 6:19-34; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Again, Jesus nowhere tells exactly what the water is or how to get it. He is doubtless encouraging her interest. The meaning could be salvation (forgiveness), the gospel (truth), fellowship with God, or perhaps more likely He includes all these in spiritual blessings that lead to eternal life.

4:15 - The woman continues her confusion

The woman clearly still was confused, for she asked Jesus to give her this water so that she would never be thirsty and not have to come to the well to draw water anymore. She was interested to see what He had to offer, though she was no doubt still skeptical.

But she still was thinking physically, despite the fact His statement referred to eternal life. She just wanted to have physical water that would forever remove her thirst, so she would never have to come to draw from the well again! (Cf. John 6:34.)

4:16-18 - Jesus asks the woman about her husband

Jesus then appeared to change the subject again. He asked her to go and bring her husband back. This might imply that the living water was for other people too. But Jesus' real intent was to help her understand the spiritual nature of her need and of the blessing He was offering her. He had offered her a source of eternal life, but she kept thinking in terms of physical thirst. So he moved to another subject, yet only to continue toward the same point: she had a spiritual need that only He can meet. She was a sinful woman and needed forgiveness. Furthermore, by bringing up her marriage He proved His ability as a prophet.

Not knowing that Jesus already knew all about her, she said she had no husband. Jesus confirmed that, in a sense this was true, but it was not the whole story. He said that, in her lifetime, she had 5 husbands, but the man she had then was not her husband.

This proved Jesus' supernatural knowledge, since He had never met her before (cf. 2:24f). This in turn eventually led her to the conclusion that His claims were true. This is the purpose of such miraculous powers.

It also demonstrated her sinful condition. The law might have allowed her to marry five times, since remarriage after death or divorce was allowed. But to have a man not her husband was not justified under either the old or the new covenants. She was living in adultery -

what people today call “living together.” Many people today think this is justified or think nothing wrong of it. Jesus obviously brought the matter up in a way that reminded them both that she was in sin.

This also shows important lessons about teaching. Many preachers are too “nice” or too “positive” to point out to people that they are in sin. Yet, Jesus had not been in conversation with this absolute stranger for more than five or ten minutes till He had brought up her sinful condition. He did not do it with ridicule, but the fact remains that He did it. And He did it in a way that showed it to be unacceptable. He did not excuse or overlook it.

On the other hand, He also did not bring it up for the sake of gloating over her or simply condemning her. He did it so He could help her overcome the problem. He was offering her a spiritual bonanza, but she refused to appreciate it until she saw her spiritual poverty. This needs to be the thrust of our preaching. We too must boldly discuss people’s sins and urge them to see wickedness as God sees it. But then we need to seek their salvation.

4:19 - The woman begins to recognize Jesus as a prophet

The woman concluded that Jesus must be a prophet. This, in effect, admitted that what He had said about her husbands was true (cf. v29). It also shows that the purpose of such miraculous powers was to confirm that the speaker was from God.

Perhaps her comment also served, on her part, to divert the discussion from the sin she was guilty of. Instead of talking about the man she lived with but was not married to, she changed the subject to who Jesus was. Nevertheless, Jesus followed her in the discussion, because she was finally coming to realize what the discussion was all about!

The woman was finally beginning to see that Jesus was trying to teach her about spiritual things. Finally, she has perceived that this is not about physical water or even about her family relations. It was about who Jesus was and about why she needed the blessings He could offer.

And note how her estimation of Jesus grew in just a short time. He was “a Jew” (v9), then “sir” (v11), then a prophet (v19). Soon she would learn that He was even more than that (cf. Matt. 16:15-18). Jesus had introduced the subject of who He was in v10. Finally, she was beginning to see the point as His real nature rose in her estimation.

This, of course, is the ultimate issue that must also be faced by all of us. We are all sinners who can be saved only through Jesus. We must ultimately face the question of who Jesus is.

4:20-22 - Question about the proper place of worship

Seeing that Jesus was a religious teacher, the woman raised a religious issue that divided the Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans worshipped God on a mountain in Samaria (Mt. Gerizim), but the Jews

said people should go to Jerusalem to worship. She apparently wanted to hear Jesus' view regarding the controversy. Note the openness of the woman in being willing to consider the view of one whose beliefs would be likely to contradict her own.

Jesus eventually told her that, on this issue, the Jews had the truth. The Samaritans worshiped in ignorance. The Jews knew the proper way to worship, for the way to salvation was being revealed by God through the Jews. They had revelation from God and were worshipping according to knowledge, whereas the Samaritans were not. However, His emphasis is on the fact that the issue would soon not matter at all.

See here the danger in following human tradition and family religion. The woman said their "fathers" had worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, but Jesus responded that they worshiped in ignorance. Many people continue to worship according to their family religion or traditions handed down to them from people. This example shows that such is not a reliable way to know the truth. Cf. Matthew 15:1-14.

Note that Jesus' statement also implies a change of the Mosaic Law. The Law clearly required worship in a specific place, and Jesus says that teaching was true. But by saying that soon would not matter, He was indicating that the law in this matter would soon change. This change occurred when He died on the cross, removed the Old Testament, and instituted the New Testament. Cf. Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

Under the gospel, there is no particular place of worship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). The law involved a specific building or structure in a specific place where people were required to go to worship God (Deuteronomy 12:5,11-14,18,21,26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2,6,7,11,15). The Samaritans were wrong, because they had chosen a different place from what the Lord had chosen (and of course, they were wrong in many other ways as well). Other people place special religious emphasis on other places. Moslems seek to worship at or toward Mecca. Some who claim to be Christians think certain buildings or cathedrals are special shrines where worship is accepted. But the New Testament is unique in that it would have no specific city or structure where worship was required. We can assemble as a local church in any place or circumstance that we can arrange in a morally proper manner.

Note also that people today often raise religious issues, like the Samaritan woman did with Jesus. Many people think such issues do not matter and there is no way to know right from wrong. Many religious teachers today would compromise or deny the Bible teaching on such issues. They tell us we should "judge not," don't offend people, don't tell people they are wrong about specific questions, don't get involved in divisive issues, but just preach a positive message. Jesus did

not preach like such men preach. He said there was a right and wrong on this issue. However, He also showed that it would not matter much longer. We ought to stand for truth, but ought not to make matters more serious than they are.

Finally, note that the stand Jesus took constituted an affirmation that the Old Testament canon, as accepted by the Jews, was correct. The Samaritans' beliefs were argued on the basis of accepting only the books of Moses. They rejected the validity of the other books that the Jews accepted as inspired. By stating that the Jews worshiped according to knowledge of the truth, Jesus was affirming that the Jews had properly determined what books to accept as inspired. This demonstrates that it was possible to know what books belong in Scripture, even though they were written over a period of many years, then copied and translated and circulated by uninspired men. The same is true of the New Testament Scriptures for us today.

4:23,24 - Jesus emphasized worship in spirit and in truth

Jesus' emphasis was not on the old controversy, but on the new way things would soon be. The hour (time) was coming and "now is" (i.e., is soon upon us) when people who worshipped truly (not in vain — Matt. 15:9) would worship in spirit and truth. The manner of worship is what would matter, not the place.

Jesus began by affirming that God is spirit: the essential nature of God is spirit. This is a fundamental point in understanding the true God and the kind of worship He wants. God is not physical. This eliminates heathen gods of stone or metal, graven images, human beings, and everything in nature (see also Acts 17:24ff). Likewise, God is not just a force or power that pervades everything in nature, such as the pantheistic God of the Hindus. God is a living spirit, who thinks, chooses, loves, acts, and communicates with man. As such, He is not limited to any specific place, so under the New Testament He would not restrict worship to a place.

Because God is spirit (not physical), He wants worship that is in harmony with spirit as well as truth. Truth is God's revealed will in the gospel (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16,17), so worship must harmonize with God's will. Any unauthorized acts in worship displease God (Matt. 15:9; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 John 9; Rev. 22:18,19; etc.). This was the problem with the Samaritan worship in context — it was not based on truth.

However, worship must also be in spirit. It must emphasize spiritual concerns, proper attitudes, sincere meaning from the inner man. God does not want outward pomp, splendor, and display for the sake of show and enjoyment of man's senses. He wants a sincere heart that expresses itself in harmony with the teachings of His word. There exists too much worship that involves going through outward motions without proper regard for the condition of the heart.

Worship in spirit requires at least all of the following: Preaching that emphasizes sincere concern for man's relationship to God and emphasizes proper understanding of the meaning of what we do; Prayer and singing that are sincerely meant from the heart, that are understood, and that emphasize spiritual concerns; Communing in the Lord's supper that remembers Jesus' death and sincerely appreciates that sacrifice so we can have proper relationship with God; Giving that is generous, cheerful, and without grudging.

Worship in truth requires at least all of the following: Preaching that is true to the meaning of God's word and emphasizes book, chapter, and verse; Prayer and singing that are Scriptural in content, recognizing God as the object of worship and Jesus as the one Mediator; Communing in the Lord's supper with the proper elements on the authorized day; Giving that is on the proper day and that supports the church in the authorized manner.

Worship that is not in spirit includes all of the following: Emphasis on material interests, entertainment, recreation, politics, making a big impression that pleases the people — the "Social Gospel"; Letting our mind wander, day-dreaming, not paying attention to or meaning what we do; Singing secular songs, not understanding what we sing, emphasizing outward beauty and mechanics instead of the message in the words, using mechanical instruments or special singing groups; Emphasizing the number of containers instead of the meaning of the elements, or teaching that the elements become Jesus' physical body and blood rather than memorials of them; Giving to impress people or because we have been pressured to give.

Worship not in truth includes: Teaching false doctrines or human practices; Prayer to Mary or saints; Mechanical instruments of music, special singing groups, secular songs; Using different elements on the Lord's supper or having it on a different day or frequency; Using man-made fund raising methods, requiring tithing, or taking collections on an unauthorized day; Burning incense, wearing special religious clothing; Using images in worship.

Obviously, we could list many other examples. Our point is simply to demonstrate that the issue of proper worship is still an important one. And worship must still be in spirit and in truth. Many people fail to please God even today by not giving the worship God desires. All of us should sincerely examine our worship to see that we truly praise God in spirit and in truth.

For further discussion about proper worship, please go to our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/ and see our articles about the various subjects listed above.

4:25,26 - Jesus confesses that He is the Messiah

As Jesus continued teaching her, the woman connected this to what she had heard about the Messiah (Christ). In particular, she believed He would know things that could not be known naturally. As Jesus told her things about herself that He could not know by any human power and as He answered her questions with authority, she wondered if He might be the Messiah. Though a Samaritan and an immoral woman, she was familiar with the coming Messiah.

Jesus affirmed simply and directly that He was the one. Here we have a straightforward affirmation by Jesus that He was the Messiah.

This is the basic issue around which every religious discussion ultimately must be resolved: Who is Jesus? Of course, as in this discussion, multitudes of other issues follow from that one. But until that issue is resolved, nothing else matters or can be ultimately resolved. Jesus' skillful direction of this discussion is a model for us in what is important in teaching. Every person needs to progress, as did this woman, from seeing Jesus as merely an interesting Jew to seeing Him as the Christ, the Son of God.

Note that Jesus here openly affirmed that He is the Messiah. Those who doubt He made such claims need to reckon with stories such as this. Perhaps in other cases He was not so direct or quick in making such statements, as He took more time to lead people to such conclusions. But in Samaria He had little time. The woman directly brought up the Messiah, so Jesus directly confessed who He is.

For other passages where Jesus confessed (or allowed others to confess), directly or indirectly, that He is the Christ or the Son of God, etc., see Matthew 3:17; 16:13-18; 17:5; 26:63-66; John 4:25,26; 8:58; 9:35-37; 20:28,29; Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 7:48,49; Matthew 20:28; 28:18,20; 26:28; John 8:24; 14:6; 3:13-15; 10:27-29; 5:22; 9:38; Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; 14:33; 28:9,17; Luke 24:52.

4:27 - Jesus' disciples return

The disciples had been in the city to buy food (v8). When they returned, they were amazed that He was talking to the woman, probably for the same reasons that the woman had been amazed that He talked to her (see v9). She was a woman and she was a Samaritan. They apparently held some of the same prejudices that other Jews did about the Samaritans.

None of the disciples said anything or asked Him why he spoke to her. But He knew their thoughts and soon used the opportunity to teach them the importance of saving all lost souls (see vv 31-38).

Jesus did not deny the Bible teaching that women should be subject to the leadership of men in the home and in the church (Genesis 2:18; 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3;

14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:4,12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-7). However, neither did He believe that woman should be demeaned to the position of a slave without value. Even more, He did not believe that her soul is of less value to God than man's soul. In the gospel, Jesus cares for the souls of all people, male and female, of all races and nationalities. He died for all. His concern for the Samaritan woman shows that we too should seek the salvation of all.

4:28-30 - The woman spreads the message of Jesus in the city

The woman had come for water. But she was apparently so excited by finding the Christ that she left her water pot and ran back to the city to tell the people about Him.

She urged the people of the city to come out and see Jesus, because He had told her all things she ever did. Everyone, of course, would have recognized this as an exaggeration. But the point is that He had demonstrated such power that she had no doubt He could tell her all that she had ever done. She asked them to consider if He might be the Christ. As a result, the people came out to see Him.

Surely we too need such zeal. We have found Jesus, and people all around us need Him. We should want to share this good news with others, as did this woman and Andrew and Philip (John 1:40-51).

The Samaritan woman demonstrates the proper role of women as teachers.

The Bible says women should not speak in church assemblies, nor may they teach with authority over men (1 Cor. 14:34f; 1 Tim. 2:11,12). But this does not mean they can never speak about spiritual things to anyone. And note that she even spoke to the "men" of the city, discussing spiritual issues with them. She spoke to all the people, regardless of gender.

This woman became the means by which nearly a whole town became followers of Jesus, yet she never spoke in a church assembly and never took authority over men. She did speak in such a way as to get people's interest, so they came to a man who could teach them. There is a definite role for women in teaching God's word (cf. Acts 18:24-28; Titus 2:3ff; etc.).

(Some say this is an example of women teaching under the Old Testament law, but the New Testament teaching on this point is based on the same principle as in the Old Testament — 1 Cor. 14:34,35.)

4:31-34 - Jesus teaches His disciples about the importance of God's work

While the woman was gone, Jesus used the opportunity to teach His apostles the importance of saving lost souls, regardless of racial differences. They had wondered why He spoke to the woman, though they had said nothing (v27). Doubtless they would not have had the

same doubts had she been a Jewish woman or even more so a Jewish man. Hence, Jesus, knowing their hearts, determined to teach them.

They had bought food, so they asked Him to eat. He said he had food they did not know about. They, as had Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, thought physical when he meant spiritual. They wondered if someone had given Him some food. Again, the skillful teacher was using this expression to get their interest and prepare them for a spiritual lesson.

Jesus explained that the food He referred to was doing the will of God and accomplishing His work. This work, Jesus meant, was more important, and in some ways more satisfying, than food. Everyone knows food is essential to life, but Jesus meant to teach them that there are things more important even than food.

Too many people think it is more important to meet physical needs than spiritual. If they are hungry, tired, feel a little bad, or are in any way physically less-than-satisfactory, they think that is reason to have no interest in spiritual things. Some even argue, "You can't convert a man who has an empty stomach. You must minister to the whole man. Feed and clothe him first, then he'll listen to the gospel." Others will not attend Bible studies, worship, or teach the lost if they are hungry, tired, etc. Others will miss these spiritual opportunities any time they have a chance to work to make money.

Jesus said it should be the other way around. The greatest need is to do the will of the Father. This does not mean physical food is not important, but it should not take priority over spiritual things. Cf. Matt. 6:19-34; 4:4; 16:26,27; Luke 12:15ff; John 6:27.

4:35 - The illustration of the harvest

Immediately Jesus jumped to another illustration. Physically, it was about four months till the harvest time (Jesus might refer here, not to the time of year it was when Jesus spoke as compared to the next harvest, but to a saying people had that stated the normal time from planting till harvest would be about four months). But Jesus said that, if they would look, they would see fields that were already prepared to be harvested.

Again, He is speaking spiritually. Some people, like the apostles in this case, do not see opportunities to teach. They may think it is not the time to try to make converts, or they may think it is not the right place, as in this instance. But Jesus saw opportunities in situations that we often do not. We need to see it as He did.

The disciples saw the need to teach Jews. But they were just passing through Samaria, and they did not see the need to teach these people that Jews did not associate with. They doubtless thought Jesus' message was for Jews, like the Old Testament was. Jesus was trying to get them to see that here was a harvest that they were not looking at.

How often do we think someone we know would not be interested in the gospel, so we just don't try? Or we think it is not the right time or place, so we neglect opportunities that could be made. Maybe there are people we just are not concerned about because of prejudices, animosities, or past experiences. What about people at work, relatives, neighbors, school mates, people we do business with, etc.?

Jesus often used sowing and reaping as illustrations to compare preaching to sowing or watering, then the response of the hearers is compared to the harvest. See Matthew 13:1-32; 9:27,38; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

4:36-38 - The one who sows and the one who reaps work together

Jesus then extended the illustration. A person who reaps in a field gets paid, since the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7). Likewise, one can gather fruit for eternal life. This shows the spiritual nature of His point. The one who sows can in this way rejoice together with the one who reaps.

It is possible for one person to sow the seed in a field and another person to reap the harvest when it becomes ripe. In that case, both have cause for joy in the harvest, because both can share in the reward.

In particular, Jesus was teaching the apostles to be teachers of His message. If they would use their opportunities, they could save lost souls. But this would be entering into the labors of others.

This can be true in various different ways (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-15). But here the point appears to be that the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist had done much work to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. His coming had been prophesied repeatedly, and John had made many disciples who were looking for Him. The apostles could now tell people Christ had come, and many would obey who otherwise would not have. Hence, they reaped the crop that others had sown.

In this case, the Samaritans already knew about the Christ, as the woman demonstrated. Here was an opportunity for people to be taught and saved, but the disciples did not recognize it. Jesus was encouraging them to use the opportunity. It appears they learned the point eventually because they spread the gospel to Samaria after it had begun in Jerusalem (Acts 8).

Harvest time is a time of joy. All the hard work of preparing the crop is then rewarded. Sower and reaper can both rejoice. Why complain or neglect to work to bring in the harvest? Rejoice. You will get your reward for your work and save souls too.

4:39-42 - The response of the Samaritans

Here is the harvest Jesus had been working for and had encouraged the apostles to become aware of. Many of these Samaritan people

came to believe in Him. The apostles originally had no interest in this. But to Jesus these were souls needing saved.

They were so interested they even wanted Jesus to stay awhile, so He did stay two days. This gave Him opportunity to teach many people. This was in some ways as amazing as the fact He had spoken to the Samaritan woman to begin with. Now the people ask a Jew to stay in their midst and teach them, and the Jew agrees to do it! Jesus was breaking down the barriers of racial prejudice, but even more He was saving souls.

This additional teaching from Jesus gave the people the final evidence they needed to become believers in Him. The woman played a role in it by telling them what she had observed in Jesus (v39). But what really convinced them was when they themselves observed Jesus, His teaching, and the evidence for His claims.

They concluded that He truly is the Savior of the world. This is an amazing truth that many people today yet need to believe. Many claim to believe He was a great man, even a great prophet. But to believe He is the Savior of the world is to go much further. It recognizes that Jesus can do what no mere man can do: He can save us from sins. And He can save, not just one nationality or even a select unconditionally predestined few as in Calvinism, but He can save anyone in the whole world! See Matthew 26:28; 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18f; 2:24; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 1:5; 5:9; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Isaiah 53:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:9-13; 13:20f; Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15

Note the many lessons the inspired author wants us to learn. One is Jesus' concern for the lost, which concern we should share. Another lesson is that here is still more testimony that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and we should accept His claims as these Samaritans did.

Still another lesson though is that, like the Samaritan woman, we can introduce people to Jesus and tell them much about Him. But people will never really be converted until they themselves learn what He is like and see the evidence that His claims are true. Today they can do that only by reading the accounts of His life and teachings and works in the Scriptures (John 20:30,31; 2 Tim. 3:16,17).

When He was alive, disciples could bring others into His physical presence. We bring them to Him by interesting them in studying the Bible accounts about Him. We will never truly convert people just by telling them how **we** feel about Him or what **we** believe or how **we** were converted. They must study and consider for themselves what He is like and the evidence for His claims. We help them when, like the Samaritan woman, we encourage them to do this.

See what great things can come from teaching a single individual? One individual converted may lead to many others converted. We must use the opportunities we have.

4:43-54 - Healing of the Nobleman's Son

4:43-45 - The people in Galilee receive Jesus favorably

Jesus had originally planned to go to Galilee (v3), but had ended up staying two days in Samaria on His way (v40). After the two-day stay in Samaria, He went on to Galilee as planned. There the Galileans received him, since they had gone to the feast in Jerusalem and had witnessed His miracles (2:23). Jewish males were required to be in Jerusalem for the Passover.

In general, the Galileans were receptive to Jesus. However, Jesus commented that a prophet has no honor in his own country. This may seem strange in the context of the reception He received. However, Matt. 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; and especially Luke 4:16-31 give more information on this comment. John does not record the fact that Jesus apparently in the meantime had visited His hometown Nazareth and was there rejected by the people. As a result, He did not do many miracles among them, and they ended up trying to kill Him. Their reason was, not that they could prove that His teaching or miracles were false or invalid, but that they knew His family — His mother, brothers, sister, etc.

Jesus' comment here means that often people do not appreciate the greatness of one with whom they grew up. They remember him when he was little and they know all the evidences of his humanity. Hence, they cannot believe that He could become so great from such humble origins (perhaps they are even a little jealous and can't believe that one from among them could become so much greater than others of them had become).

4:46,47 - A nobleman requests Jesus to heal his son

Jesus again went to visit Cana (see **map**), where He had done His first miracle (turning water to wine — John 2:1ff). In this story, He did another great miracle, one that also is recorded only by John.

A nobleman came to see Jesus, because he had a sick son back in Capernaum (see **map**). Commentators point out that the word for nobleman means an officer or official in service of a king. Other examples are Chusa (Luke 8:3) and Manaen (Acts 13:1). Perhaps this nobleman was a servant of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.

The man had heard that Jesus had come. So, he came from Capernaum and implored Jesus to come and heal his son, because he was at the point of death. Note the details that help us see the greatness of the miracle. The son was not just a little sick with some illness that could easily have cured itself. He was almost dead. Further, he was in a different city, some miles away from Jesus.

The nobleman seemed to think this latter problem was insurmountable if Jesus remained where He was. He thought Jesus had to come and personally have contact with his son to heal him. Of course,

modern miracle-workers would know they could not heal a person under such circumstances. But it was no problem for Jesus.

Some commentators seem to criticize the nobleman for weakness of faith. And it is true that his faith grew as the story proceeded. Nevertheless, he had faith enough to travel about 25 miles from Capernaum to Galilee to plead with Jesus to come and heal his son.

4:48,49 - Jesus states the value of miracles

Jesus stated that such miracles were necessary in order for people to believe. John recorded this statement to show us the purpose for the miracles and thereby help us understand why we need to know about them and be convinced by them. They are the stamp of God's approval on a prophet showing him to be who he claims to be, confirming that he is a teacher from God. This is why John recorded several miraculous events and gave much detail regarding them. (Cf. Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39.)

Again, some commentators seem to think that Jesus is belittling this attitude, as almost a sign of weakness among the people. Some false miracle workers today criticize those who call upon them to do a miracle in order to prove the power they claim to have. But contrary to these claims, Jesus not only did not oppose this use of miracles, but He knew and agreed this was a valid evidence to prove a man was from God. Jesus worked miracles for people who were honestly seeking for truth. He refused only when people had seen sufficient evidence and had rejected it, yet called for more proof (Mark 8:11,12; Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

The nobleman again urged Jesus to hurry because his son was about to die. This again confirmed the seriousness of the case. But it also shows that the nobleman thought Jesus had to get there before his son died. He seemed to doubt that Jesus could heal without being in the son's immediate presence. And above all, he did not allow for the possibility that Jesus could raise the son after he died. He thought, like a physician today, the healer would have to see the sick person and heal him before he died. After death, the case would be hopeless.

4:50-54 - Jesus heals the nobleman's son

The man had wanted Jesus to go with him; instead, Jesus just told him to go on by himself, because his son was healed. The man believed this and went on. This required a measure of faith on his part. He had come begging for Jesus' personal presence to heal the son. But he accepted Jesus' simple statement that the miracle had occurred.

Note that Jesus' manner of handling this increased the force of the miracle. The purpose was to produce faith. Had He personally gone (as the nobleman had requested), a miracle would have occurred. But by doing the miracle while still miles away, He made it even more obvi-

ous. Doctors can sometimes heal by physical means, if they examine the patient, do tests, give medicines and treatments, etc.; and all this takes time to work. But the fact Jesus needed no such methods proved clearly that His healing was done, not by physical means, but by supernatural power.

And He further emphasized His power to do miracles by declaring it to have definitely occurred as an accomplished fact. Though He could not see the sick person to know firsthand whether or not he had been healed, Jesus definitely declared him to be healed. He expressed no doubt or uncertainty in the matter. This also served to demonstrate the man's faith and then to strengthen it when he left and later learned the results.

In order to emphasize the evidence for the miracle, John tells us that, as the man was returning home, he met his servants coming to meet him. They told him the son was healed. He asked what time the change in the child had occurred; the time they named (the seventh hour on the previous day) was exactly the time when Jesus had told the nobleman his son was healed. Note that this also states one of the obvious symptoms of the son's disease: he had a fever. We are not told what disease caused the fever, but this was an obvious sign showing when he was healed.

As was always the case with Bible miracles, the healing occurred instantaneously at the moment the man of God said it would. This caused the man and his family to have faith — the very purpose of miracles. The man possessed some faith or he would never have come to Jesus. But his faith was strengthened by the miracle. And other people also came to possess faith or were strengthened in faith as a result.

This is exactly the purpose of miracles as Jesus had stated in v48. The story accomplishes the same purpose for us. If the fact that such events lead people to faith was something unfortunate or inferior, why did Jesus go to such lengths to do such an obvious miracle, and why did John go to such lengths to record it in detail?

Some commentators point out that the miracle occurred at one o'clock, but the man did not arrive home till the next day. It would seem that, if he was still in great anxiety for his son's health, he would have traveled the 25 miles to Capernaum on the same day that he saw Jesus. That he did not hurry could indicate great faith that Jesus really had healed his son. But perhaps there was some other reason we are unaware of.

This was the second sign Jesus had done when He came out of Judea into Galilee. Jesus had done miracles in Judea (2:23). This verse might appear to mean that, on this particular trip, since he left Judea, Jesus had done some other miracle in Galilee that is not recorded. And this was the second one He did since he left Judea.

However, a more reasonable view is that John has in view only the miracles Jesus did in Galilee, the first one being the changing of water to wine. This would then be the second of His miracles in Galilee.

John 5

Chap. 5 - The Healing of an Infirm Man

5:1-18 - The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

5:1,2 - Jesus in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethesda

The event recorded here occurred back in Jerusalem after the healing of the nobleman's son (end of chap. 4). Jesus had again gone there for a feast. We are not told how much time had transpired or what feast this was. So apparently, these facts are not important to the story.

What is important is the miracle that John records. He tells the story because it gives opportunity for him to describe another miracle that Jesus did to confirm John's claims regarding Him. This is another miracle that is not recorded by the other writers, so it adds new information that confirms Jesus' claims.

In Jerusalem was a pool called Bethesda. It was near the Sheep Gate, and had five porches. This is where the healing occurred.

Some claim that the fact John used present tense ("there is") in describing the pool as proof that John wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, King points out that John could simply be using the present tense relative to the time of the event he describes (not relative to the time when he wrote). And further, pools were unlikely to have been destroyed when the city fell. King points out that the pool is referred to as being visited by people even into the third and fourth centuries.

5:3,4 - The sick people at the pool

In the porches around the pool lay various sick people (blind, lame, paralyzed, etc.) waiting for the water to move. It is said that an angel came down and stirred the pool, and when this happened, the first person to step into the pool was healed of his disease.

It is unclear to me whether the reference to the angel and the healings describes what really happened or whether it simply describes the belief of the people. (Note that the description of the angel, etc., is omitted in ASV, etc.) If the account is genuine, John might simply be describing the people's view without affirming it is true. Compare v18, where John says, "He broke the Sabbath"; yet this clearly refers to what the people thought, not to the truth of what happened.

If this was just a superstition believed by the people, we may wonder why so many people would stay there obviously hoping for a healing? Clearly, they believed the miracles occurred. Maybe the water did possess some natural healing properties. Or maybe the people just received psychosomatic “healings.” Desperate people today flock by the thousands to faith healers, despite the fact they perform no real miracles. The people here were said to be blind, lame, or paralyzed. But obviously none of them could quickly step into the water. The person who was quick enough to jump into the water first must not have been in terrible shape to begin with.

Furthermore, the event described is very much unlike real Bible miracles. The account has some characteristics of a superstition like modern belief in faith healers. Why heal only those who could step in first? Wouldn't that mean that, almost invariably, the most severely ill people - who needed the miracle the most - would not be healed, like the man Jesus healed in this account? And why do such miracles repeatedly, but only occasionally? I know of no genuine Bible miracle that fits such a pattern.

However, the important point of John's story is not the question of whether or not these miracles really occurred. The point is that Jesus unquestionably here did a genuine miracle.

5:5-7 - The infirm man Jesus found

Jesus, coming there, found a man who had suffered for 38 years from a certain infirmity. We are not told what it was, but it was evidently quite severe; he had been troubled by it for 38 years, and it evidently rendered him so incapacitated that he needed someone else to put him into the water. Note how these facts demonstrate beyond doubt the reality of the man's infirmity. This was no imagined, psychological, or psychosomatic disease.

When He realized the man's illness and how long he had suffered, Jesus asked if the man wanted to be made well. This appears to be, like many other questions asked by Jesus and God, a rhetorical question designed mainly to get the person's attention and to introduce what Jesus intended to do. It was obvious the man wanted to be healed. Jesus was simply making an opening remark to call attention to the man's need.

The man said his problem was that, when the water was troubled, he could not get into the water quickly enough. Someone else always stepped in before he did. Jesus evidently chose this man to concentrate on, because his case was so obviously severe. He did not pick one of the easier cases, but one that was obvious and otherwise could not be cured.

5:8,9 - Jesus heals the man

Jesus solved the man's problem without the pool or any other method. He simply told the man to get up, take up his bed, and walk. It is obvious that the man had not been able to walk before: he could not get to the pool before others did. Yet, when Jesus told him to do so, he got up, took his bed (pallet), and walked. This happened immediately.

Here, as in all Bible miracles for which we are given the details, we see convincing evidence that what happened was impossible by natural law and must, therefore, have happened by the supernatural power of God.

(1) There was no doubt about the existence of the ailment. The man had this infirmity for 38 years. He was so disabled he could not get to the pool without help. (2) He was healed immediately. (3) His healing was so complete and obvious that he was able, not just to walk, but to carry away the pallet on which he had previously been confined. He surely could not walk before, and he had the infirmity for many years. Even if the cause of his ailment were removed, he would naturally need time to regain strength and coordination to walk. Yet he could do so immediately, proving the miraculous nature of the healing. (4) Note further that there is absolutely no evidence that this man had faith before he was healed. In fact, even after the healing occurred he was still not sure who had healed him (v12f) (though no doubt the people following with Jesus would have known who did it).

Where are the modern faith healers who can duplicate such healings repeatedly and without a failure, as Jesus did? Yet they claim to have the same power from God that Jesus possessed.

This verse closes by telling us when this happened: the Sabbath day. In so saying, John introduces the controversy that followed, as described in subsequent verses.

5:10,11 - Jewish leaders criticize the man regarding Sabbath law

Certain Jews found the healed man and told him it was not lawful for him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. The man explained that he was carrying the bed, because he had been told to do so by the one who had healed him.

The Jews should have been impressed by the fact the man who gave this instruction had done a great miracle. If He could do a miracle, He must have been from God (cf. 3:2 etc.). The purpose of miracles was to confirm a man to be a teacher from God. If Jesus could do such a great miracle and then told the man to carry away his bed, that of itself should have proved that carrying the bed was in harmony with God's law. Otherwise, God would not have confirmed Jesus' teaching by the miracle.

Instead of assuming Jesus was wrong because He told someone to do something on the Sabbath, the Jews should have known that He was from God because He did miracles. Why pit their views against His? They surely could not do any such miracle! They should have been amazed at the miracle, joyful for the healed man, and grateful to God. No such qualities characterized them. Their selfish, evil motives become more obvious as their conflict with Jesus continued.

Note that the Jews began by questioning the man's conduct, but they soon switched to questioning Jesus' conduct. They ended up opposing Him because He **healed** on the Sabbath (vv 16,18 — see notes later). But the original question concerned the act of the healed man in carrying his pallet.

Was this truly a violation of the law?

Consider Ex. 31:14,15; Num. 15:32-36; Jer. 17:21-23; Neh. 13:15-22. These verses forbid working on the Sabbath, especially carrying burdens. But it is not at all clear from the passages that a case such as this one was included.

The Nehemiah passage makes clear that men were condemned for carrying burdens in their business for personal profit, just like they did on other days of the week. In Jeremiah, carrying a burden into the gates of the city or out of the house is condemned. This man did none of those things. But the issue here is not a mere technicality or loophole in the law; rather, the intent of the activity must be considered in determining whether or not the law was violated. The man was not working for personal gain or profit, nor was he doing ordinary work such as could be done on a weekday. What he was doing related to a special act of mercy and healing from sickness. It was not an everyday work activity and was not part of his business activity for personal profit. Jesus had already shown that the law did not condemn such acts (see notes on Matt. 12:1-14).

The Sabbath law did not condemn all human effort. Men on the Sabbath would chew food and swallow, carry clothes on their bodies, breathe, pump blood throughout their bodies, digest food, etc., just like on other days. They also did work in the temple offering animal sacrifices. If an emergency arose in which even an animal needed special care to save it from death or danger, they met the emergency even though work was involved on the Sabbath. In 7:21-23 Jesus pointed out that the Jews would do the work of circumcising a child, even if the day for doing so fell on the Sabbath. The command to circumcise constituted spiritual work, but it did not violate the command to do no work on the Sabbath. No one considered these acts to be wrong, though they could technically fit some definitions of "work." The conclusion is clear that the Sabbath law never did forbid all kinds of "work," just certain kinds for certain purposes. The Jews had great detailed restrictions in their human tradition that defined what work was

and was not acceptable on the Sabbath, so even they knew that not all work was condemned.

The real problem here was, not that Jesus violated God's real law, but that He violated man-made human traditions (see Matt. 15:1ff). In simple fact, Jesus never broke the Sabbath law nor any other Divine law, nor did He ever teach others to do so. Had he broken the law, He would have been a sinner. But the Bible clearly and repeatedly states that He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; etc.).

Note that the Jews never did pursue the issue of the "work" this man did. This shows that, either they knew that what the man did was not wrong, or else they did not really care about that. What they were concerned about was proving Jesus' wrong, so they moved on to that issue.

5:12-14 - Jesus' identity revealed to the healed man

The Jews then turned their attention to the one who had told the healed man to carry his bed. They asked who he was. But the healed man did not know, because there was a great multitude and Jesus had left. Though Jesus had done a great miracle for him, he evidently did not even know Jesus' name and could not otherwise identify Him to the Jews. Compare this to the modern "faith healers." Do they leave after doing their "miracles" without making sure everyone involved knows they were the ones who did the "miracle" (and asking for a financial gift)?

Later, however, Jesus met the man again in the temple and told him that he should turn from sin or he would suffer something worse than the disease he had. This shows how Jesus viewed sin and its consequences. It is a greater problem with more severe consequences even than serious physical diseases. It leads to eternal punishment, which Jesus warned was worse than death. Physical suffering and death are in fact not a major concern compared to the consequences of sin (Luke 12:4,5).

Bad as serious illnesses are, there is "a fate worse than death," and that is sin. Yet, many people today are easily moved to compassion about people who have serious illness, but seem to care little or nothing about the problems caused by sin.

5:15,16 - The healed man identifies Jesus to the Jews

Jesus' second encounter with the man He had healed served to identify Jesus to the man. Since the Jews had asked who had healed him, the man then told them it was Jesus. There is no evidence that the man did this with any malice or ulterior motive toward Jesus. It is probable that he did not know why the Jews wanted this information. Perhaps he even thought they would honor and respect Him when they knew.

What really happened, however, is that the Jews persecuted Jesus and even wanted to kill Him, because He had healed on the Sabbath day. Note the evil and sinister attitudes of these Jews. Instead of respecting Jesus as a prophet from God because He could do such great miracles, they wanted to kill Him! Such was their zeal for their human traditions that they would seek to kill a man for doing a deed that ought to have proved to them that He was from God!

Note also, as mentioned before, that they no longer seem concerned about the conduct of the man who was carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The issue now is what **Jesus** had done on the Sabbath in healing the man.

5:17 - Jesus compares His work to that of His Father

Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath was one of the main objections the Jews had toward Jesus. On nearly every other point on which they confronted Him, He so completely disproved them that they were forced to drop the issue. But this one came up over and over again. Jesus answered their objections often, using various different arguments - all of them valid, of course (see notes on Matt. 12:1ff).

Here Jesus answered by showing that it is just as valid for Him to work on the Sabbath as it was for the Father to work, and the Father had been working continually up till that time. The Jews correctly understood that the "Father" referred to God, the Heavenly Father (v18).

Jesus' point is that the Sabbath institution related to the fact that God rested on the seventh day of creation. If in fact God - whose conduct is the very basis for the Sabbath - actually continues to work on the Sabbath, then that would prove that not all work on the Sabbath was forbidden. Note that Jesus was the One who did the work of creation and therefore was the One who rested on the seventh day (John 1:1-3), so He ought to know what happened then! If He says that, both He and His Father continue to work, even on the Sabbath, who can successfully dispute it?

While I may not understand all the implications of Jesus' argument here, it would surely include the following: Gen. 2:3 does not say that God rested from **all** work on the seventh day, but only from the work of creation. Other passages describe works of God that He has continued to do since creation, including on the Sabbath. He gives to all life and breath and all things, and in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:25,28). He gives rain and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17), and sends the rain and makes the sun shine on the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45). He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). He upholds all things by the word of His power (Col. 1:17; Neh. 9:6; Heb. 1:3). In all these ways, God is working every day, even on the Sabbath day. Were He to cease working for even one day - any day - we would cease existing! Hence, every day that we receive these gifts, that is proof God is working on that day. Hereby Jesus proved by the example

of God Himself that not all work was forbidden on the Sabbath – especially works of mercy and provision for the needs of others were not forbidden.

But more specifically, the Jews here and elsewhere objected to the fact Jesus did a miracle on the Sabbath. To them that was a forbidden form of “work.” But from what source came the power to do the miracle? Why all miracles are by the power of God. In fact, miracles are often called “works” of **God**. Hence, the very fact that a miracle occurs, in and of itself proves that God is working. And if a miracle occurs on the Sabbath, then that proves God is working on the Sabbath. But the Jews objected to miracles being done on the Sabbath. Hence, Jesus here proved that they were objecting to the work of God Himself!

The very fact that the miracle in question had occurred on the Sabbath, in and of itself proved that God believes in doing works of mercy and kindness on the Sabbath. If God did not believe in and approve of it, it could not have happened! The purpose of the gifts was to confirm the word of the one through whom the miracle was done (see John 4:42). If Jesus taught that this kind of work could be done on the Sabbath and then did miracles, that was God’s confirmation on His teaching.

Hence, the work of the Father, specifically in doing the miracle in question, in and of itself served to prove Jesus’ right to so work (see v19). If God provided on the Sabbath day the power to do the work, then Jesus had the right on the Sabbath day to do the work. The very nature of the work in question ought to have silenced the opponents. To condemn Jesus’ work was to condemn the Father. To accept the right of the Father to do miracles on the Sabbath, however, was to accept the right of Jesus (or any one) to allow that work to be done through Him on the Sabbath.

5:18 - The Jews then opposed Jesus for claiming equality with God

Jesus’ argument, however, just turned the Jews more fully against Him. This is often true when forceful arguments are given to those who have ulterior motives and are determined to continue their preferred course of action regardless of the evidence. The more powerful the evidence, the more upset they become when it is presented (see on 3:19ff). Instead of concluding that Jesus was wrong because He healed on the Sabbath, they should have considered the miracle to be evidence that He was right and they were wrong.

But instead of admitting the force of Jesus’ evidence, the Jews became all the more determined to kill Jesus. But now they chose this course, not just because (they thought) He broke the Sabbath, but also because He called God His Father, making Himself equal with God (blasphemy). Violation of the Sabbath and blasphemy were both capit-

al crimes under the law. Had Jesus been guilty of either, He would have been worthy of death. But in truth He was guilty of neither.

There is a sense in which God is the spiritual Father to all who obey Him (2 Cor. 6:16ff; Matt. 12:49,50; 6:9; etc.). But the Jews were right in concluding that Jesus' language here was claiming a unique relationship with the Father that no one but Him possesses. And it is true that this unique position means that Jesus possessed Deity. Other Scriptures confirm this (see on John 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8). In fact, remember that John 1:1-3 shows that Jesus' work in creation proves that He possesses Deity along with the Father.

However, it must be remembered that John 5:18 is stating the conclusion the Jews reached about what Jesus had said. They also concluded that He broke the Sabbath, but they were in error. So, someone might likewise suspect that their conclusion that Jesus was claiming Deity, being a human conclusion, **might** have been in error. Such an approach, however, overlooks the force of Jesus' argument.

While v18 states the conclusion of fallible, erring men, the fact remains that the **evidence** Jesus presented in the context does prove that Jesus was claiming Deity with the Father. He was claiming to work like the Father worked. In fact, He claimed that, He Himself did the work of creating (John 1:3) and so understood the Sabbath from the beginning. Note that He did not deny their conclusion about His claim to Deity, though He did deny their claim that He broke the Sabbath.

This is a claim to Deity, and the Jews properly so understood it. But it was not blasphemy, for the simple reason that the claim was true! And Jesus' miracles – including the one He had just done – proved the claim to be true.

5:19-30 - Jesus Presents His Claims

5:19 - Jesus does what the Father does

Jesus here begins a lengthy statement answering the Jews' objections to His claims (v18). This becomes a summary of the points John is trying to make about Jesus. First Jesus states His claims (vv 19-30), then He gives the evidence for those claims (vv 31-47).

Jesus did nothing of Himself, but did what He saw the Father do (v19). This is not said to belittle Jesus' authority and work, but to exalt it. **Jesus does whatever God the Father does!**

There is apparently a sense in which Jesus is subject to the Father even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). But when He came to earth, Jesus took on the form of a **man** to learn **obedience** – i.e., to experience what it is like to be fully subject to Deity as a servant, just as men have to be subject (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 5:8,9; 4:15). While on earth, Jesus could act only by God's authority.

However, Jesus' point here is that He had been authorized and empowered by the Father to do miracles (and other works) that He learned from the Father. This included healing on the Sabbath (v17). The Father did a miracle on the Sabbath (through Jesus) and did other work on the Sabbath. Jesus was just doing as the Father does, so He was acting by the highest authority. For the Jews to accuse Him of doing wrong by healing on the Sabbath would be folly, since He could not have done it except by the authority of Deity (see on v17).

But Jesus is claiming to do any work the Father can do: creation, miracles, and forgiveness of sins. And He will eventually claim power to raise the dead and judge all men. Imagine a mere human or even an angel making such a claim. Such would be blasphemy, but Jesus made the claim and proceeded to provide the evidence that it was valid.

The Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit) are one in their works and power. The Son does not act independently from the others, but they also do not act independently from Him. They work together in complete unity and agreement. This is the sense in which there is one God, yet three separate individuals. And while Jesus is, in some sense led by the Father and especially on earth was a servant to the Father even as we are, yet He here claims power to do whatever the Father can do.

5:20 - The Father's love for the Son will lead to even greater works

There was no antagonism or opposition between Jesus and the Father, as the Jews thought. Instead, the Father loved Jesus and (by implication) approved of all He did. Jesus knew the works of the Father because, in His relationship with the Father, He was able to witness firsthand what He did. Jesus then did as the Father did.

The Jews had just seen evidence that Jesus had healed a man of an infirmity he had for 38 years. So great was the man's ailment that he needed help to move from the porch to the pool of water. But great as were the miracles the people had already seen in Jesus, there would be yet greater works than these that Jesus would do as He had seen the Father do (v19). This would truly amaze the people. Some of these works are alluded to in the subsequent verses, including raising the dead and judging all mankind.

Again, Jesus is describing the unity or oneness between the Father and Himself. The Father did not condemn Jesus but approved of Him. How else could His miracles be explained? As a result, Jesus deserved to be exalted, not criticized by the people.

5:21 - Jesus gives life to whom He will

One particular work done by Jesus, even as the Father does, is to raise the dead, giving life to them. The record does not show that Jesus had yet done this, but He here assured them He could. Later He did

raise people on earth (see John 11), and someday He will raise all the dead (see vv 28,29).

However, He not only raised people physically from the dead, He also can raise men from sin and give them spiritual life (see notes on vv 24,25).

Again, these are truly amazing claims. That is John's point in quoting them. But Jesus (and John) will yet give proof for these claims. Specifically, Bible accounts show that He did raise the dead. The Father had this power and had demonstrated in through Old Testament prophets. Jesus here claims the same power. He and His Father shared the same power to do miracles. What amazing claims!

5:22 - Jesus has power to judge men's lives

What is more, another great work Jesus will do is to judge all men. He had not come to earth (the first time) to do this (3:17). But the Father had committed to Him the responsibility to judge all men. Someday later He will come and fulfill this duty (Acts 17:31; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10).

This is clearly a work of Deity, yet the Father will leave it entirely up to Jesus. Again, Jesus is claiming power that no one but God could rightly claim. It is folly to read this and still try to argue that Jesus claimed to be just a good man or that He did not claim Deity for Himself.

5:23 - Having Divine power, Jesus deserved Divine glory

Since He has all these powers of Deity, Jesus flatly asserted that all people should honor Him "even as" they honor the Father. He ought to receive the same kind and degree of honor that the Father does. But the Father is worshipped as Deity, and none can receive that honor who is not deity (cf. Isa. 42:8; Matt. 4:10; Acts 10:25,26; Rev. 22:8,9; etc.). The fact that Jesus should be honored "even as" the Father proves that He is equal with the Father as Deity. See also Jesus' claim in John 17:5.

Further, if people refuse to give Christ this honor, then they are likewise refusing to honor the Father, since the Father sent the Son. Jesus represented the Father, spoke the will of the Father, and revealed the Father. This was proved by His miracles and other evidence He would yet provide. When He claimed the power and honor of God, therefore, it must be true. To deny, belittle, or refuse to honor Him is to treat the Father in the same way, since the Father sent Him and confirmed His claims. Such was the state of these Jews who criticized Jesus despite the evidence of His miracles. And such is also the state of any today who deny Jesus' Deity and fail to worship Him as Deity.

These are truly amazing claims Jesus made. And He made them in the face of people who were criticizing Him for claiming equality with God (v18). Just in case anyone had mistaken His intent and thought

His critics were mistaken and He was not claiming Deity, Jesus adds claims that remove all doubt. Had the Jews mistaken His meaning and if He believed He did not possess Deity, by all means Jesus should have made His true views clear at this point. But instead of denying that He was claiming Deity along with the Father, Jesus' explanation confirmed it (see also on John 1:1-3; 20:28).

5:24 - Faith in Jesus leads to eternal life

Since Jesus possesses Deity and was God in the flesh on earth, He further affirmed that people must hear His message and believe His claims in order to have eternal life. Those who do so will not stand condemned, but will pass from death to life. We pass from death to life in a spiritual sense, passing from spiritual death to spiritual life — being born again as in John 3:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:26,27; 1 Pet. 1:23; etc.

This does not mean righteous people will not even be judged, for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, good and bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). It means we will not stand condemned when we are judged.

Again, we see the absolute need for faith in order to be saved. Those who lack faith have no hope of salvation. But please note (and if necessary restudy) our discussion on John 3:16. In this context, Jesus was speaking to Jews who demonstrated disbelief in Him, so He assures them they must have faith to have eternal life. Other passages show that the faith here described must be obedient faith to save. Nothing here is intended to deny the need for obedience; it simply affirms the need for hearing and faith. But other passages show that faith must be a comprehensive faith, including obedience.

And as in our discussion on John 3:36, this is not teaching once saved, always saved. The passage states a clear condition one must meet to have everlasting life: he must hear Jesus' teaching and believe the message of God with obedient faith. But people can cease to hear and believe (with obedience); if they do, then they cease to be destined for eternal life.

Again, what amazing claims! Jesus is saying He is equal with the Father as Deity, and we must hear and believe this to be saved! Who but God would dare to make such claims?

5:25 - Jesus has power to give life to those hear His voice

In v24, Jesus had said that those who hear and believe Him will receive eternal life. Here He continued saying about the same thing. He says the hour is coming “and now is” when the dead would hear His voice and live. See the parallel to v24: those who hear His voice and believe will pass from death to life. “And now is” means it is very near at hand — cf. John 4:23. This appears to mean that this would be the effect of the gospel; the hour had come that the gospel was about to take effect so that men could be saved.

This does not refer to the final coming of Jesus and the physical resurrection, as in vv 28,29. There He said that hour “is coming,” but He did not say it “now is,” as in this verse and in John 4:23. The dead coming to life in v25 then must be the same as in v24, and is a further explanation of it. One must hear Jesus’ word and believe it. If so, he has eternal life and will not be condemned because he *has* passed from death to life. This occurs in this present life. It is the spiritual re-birth and resurrection to newness of life (see verses cited above plus Col. 2:12ff; Eph. 2).

V25 repeats the concept of v24 saying that those who are dead and hear Jesus voice will life. V26 then continues this thought.

5:26 - Jesus has the power to give life, even as the Father does

“For” shows that this verse gives the reason why the statements of the previous verses are true. The Father has life in Himself. Life is such an inherent part of His character that He can give life to others. In the same sense, the Father has given the Son power to have life in Himself — i.e., the Son was empowered while on earth, and as a result of His life on earth, to cause people to spiritually pass from death to life (as described in vv 24,25). The Son can give life to whom He will, just as the Father can (v21).

This explains why Jesus can enable people to pass from spiritual death to life. By Him they can be forgiven and become children of God, born again, having spiritual relationship with Him and hope of eternal life. This does not deny that Jesus inherently had power of life. But on earth He took the status of a servant and did only what the Father empowered Him to do (see on v19).

5:27 - Again, Jesus claimed the power to execute judgment

And not only can Jesus give people spiritual life instead of death, He also has authority to judge all men because He is the Son of Man. This is the same point as in v22. Note how vv 26,27 parallel vv 21,22.

As a “son of man,” Jesus experienced the temptations of living live people must live. He can understand our problems (as described in the book of Hebrews), yet without sin. This makes Him uniquely qualified as our Judge. This does not mean He would not have been qualified to judge had He not come as a man. But He now has personally experienced what we face here, so we can be assured that He understands and that He cares about us. As the Son of God, He has the infallible wisdom to judge. As the Son of Man, He has the personal experience to assure us that He will judge with fairness and justice.

5:28,29 - Jesus will raise all men at the resurrection

Apparently, some in the audience were amazed at Jesus’ claims, as we ourselves are amazed. But Jesus said that they should not be sur-

prised that He will raise men spiritually from the dead (vv 24,25) when, in fact, He is also going to raise them physically from the dead!

These verses are a further explanation of His ability to give life and raise the dead; yet it is also a contrast in that this refers to a different kind of resurrection. His previous statement was that only those who hear and believe the gospel would thereby pass from death to life (vv 24,25). But the resurrection described here is for all men, good and bad. It refers to all who are in the graves – physically dead. And it will happen sometime in the future (the hour “is coming,” in contrast to “and now is”).

Note that **all** in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth. Those who did good will be raised to eternal life. Wicked people will be raised to condemnation.

Jesus here directly contradicts the premillennial theory, which teaches there will be two different resurrections – one for the righteous and another for the wicked - occurring at two different times, separated by 1000 years. Jesus’ teaching instead is that **all**, both good and bad will come forth at the same “hour.” Compare Acts 24:15 – a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

The difference is not in **when** they will occur, but in the **reward** each receives. Good people receive life and evil people receive condemnation. But it is the same resurrection at the same hour. Many other passages describe this resurrection and judgment — Heb. 9:27; Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:11ff; 1 Cor. 15; etc.

Note the plain and undeniable statement of Jesus that all people will be raised from the dead. Death is not the end of man’s existence. He who has the power of life will bring them back to life. There can be no denying that Jesus plainly believed in life after death.

Likewise, Jesus plainly taught that men would be rewarded eternally after this life: life or condemnation. And note that there are only two eternal destinies: no middle ground and no second chance. This is Jesus teaching. All who teach otherwise need to submit to the will of Him who has the power of life.

5:30 - Jesus judges according to the will of the Father

Jesus then explained the standard by which He was acting. He did not act alone or simply by His own ideas. He was judging according to what He heard. His judgment was righteous because He was seeking the will of His Father who sent Him, not His own will.

Jesus came to live as a man, though He possessed Deity from the beginning (Phil. 2:5-8; John 1:1,14). As a man, He learned obedience (Heb. 5:8,9). He knew by experience what it was like to have to obey God’s will as people do.

Jesus is not here denying His Deity, for He has repeatedly affirmed it (1:1-3; 20:28; etc.). It is true that, even today, Jesus is subject

to the Father (1 Cor. 11:3; see notes on John 5:19). But this seems to refer, here in 5:30, as in 5:19, to the fact that Jesus was submitting to the Father's will as a man (son of man —v27). (Note that the verbs are in the present tense: "I judge," "I seek," etc. This refers, not to the final judgment, but to what He was doing even at the time He spoke.)

In any case, there is complete harmony between Jesus' will and that of the Father, hence there is no conflict or disagreement.

5:31-47 - Jesus Presents His Witnesses

5:31,32 - Jesus claims to have other witnesses

Having stated His claims, Jesus proceeded to call a series of witnesses that His claims are valid.

He admitted, first, that they should not accept His claims as true simply because He made the claims. He is not here denying that He Himself is a valid witness. At other times, He called upon Himself as one of His witnesses. See our notes on John 8:13-18, where Jesus' point is explained more fully. He is a witness, but people should not believe just one witness if there were no other witnesses to confirm the claims. Many people make claims they cannot prove. In particular, many people have claimed to be Messiahs. Jesus did not expect people to accept His claims without proof.

Faith must be based on convincing evidence (Romans 10:17). This is Jesus' approach, and is the approach emphasized in John's gospel. It is also the approach we should use to convince doubters. Do not expect people to believe in God, Jesus, the Bible, or in any particular doctrine without proof. Give them the evidence and let them make their own choice.

Hence, Jesus was not His only witness, but He had another witness, who told the truth about Him. This probably refers primarily to the Father, whose testimony will be described more fully soon. But first Jesus refers to John's testimony.

5:33-35 - John the Baptist's testimony

The first witness Jesus calls upon is John the Baptist. The Jews had asked John expressly what he said about Jesus, and John had borne witness. He had said that Jesus was a man from God, a man much greater than himself, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the Son of God (see John 1:6-15,19-36; 3:22-31).

John's testimony may not fully describe Jesus' greatness, but it would surely show that Jesus was from God and was far greater even than John. Since John was a prophet, then we ought to consider him a witness who confirmed that Jesus' claims are true.

Jesus did not rest His claims primarily on the testimony of John or of any human, since He had even greater testimony (v36). He did not reject John's testimony, for John was sent by God to testify regard-

ing Jesus. Yet, He affirmed that there is even greater testimony than John's.

In a sense, Jesus did not need any man's testimony to prove who He was. He was who He was regardless of what men think about it. Truth is truth, regardless of who does or does not believe it. Yet, in order for people to be convinced of the truth so they could be saved, they needed evidence. So, Jesus listed John as a witness.

John was more than just a man; he was a prophet. As such, he revealed light from God like a lamp burning and shining in the dark. (The word for "light" here refers to a lesser light than the word used for Jesus in 1:8, etc.) People rejoiced in that light and benefited from it. So, let them now consider the significance of that light. John was a forerunner to testify of Jesus. These people needed to accept the conclusion of John's testimony regarding who Jesus was. If so, they would quit rejecting Jesus and finding fault.

5:36 - The testimony of Jesus' miracles

Jesus then went beyond John's testimony by calling upon a still greater witness. This witness would give even more convincing evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be. The very works He did proved that He is from God, sent by God, and empowered by God to do what He was doing. How could He do such great miracles as He had done without the power and approval of God (John 3:2; 4:48)?

The purpose of miracles was to confirm the teaching and give people evidence that the one through whom the miracle was worked was really from God (Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31). This was taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. These Jews should have clearly understood this from the case of Moses, Elijah, and other Old Testament prophets.

Since Jesus did miracles, the Jews should not have been finding fault with His teaching but should have realized it was from God. Specifically, they should not have objected to His healing on the Sabbath, but should have realized it would not have happened had God not been working through Him.

In this way Jesus returned to the claim He had made in v17 that He worked as the Father worked (see notes there). This was the claim that led to their charge that He was making Himself equal with God. He has now shown how His works proved that claim to be true.

5:37,38 - The Father as a witness

Jesus affirmed that the Father had sent Him, and the Father Himself had testified that Jesus was from God. He did this through the miracles Jesus did (as in v36). Perhaps Jesus also referred here to the direct testimony, given at Jesus' baptism, that Jesus was God's beloved Son in whom He was well pleased (Luke 3:22). This was direct testi-

mony from the Father in heaven as to who Jesus was, confirmed by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. John the Baptist had already told them of this event (1:29-34), and said it was the concrete evidence that Jesus was the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. No doubt, many other people also witnessed the event, since it occurred at the time and place that many were coming to John for baptism. The Father gave similar testimony at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).

Jesus then pointed out that the Jews were in no position to disprove His claims. They had not seen God; they were not prophets who had received a voice or revelation from God. So, what evidence could they present to disprove His claims?

Jesus had cited John the Baptist, who was generally recognized as a prophet. Now He had cited His own miracles, which could only have come from God. He had affirmed that the Father Himself had testified of Jesus. In the light of this evidence, the only way these Jews could still reject His claims would be if they themselves were prophets and had some revelation telling them that He was not from God. But such was not the case (and if they had claimed it they could not have proved it). Hence, they had no basis to dispute His claims at all.

So Jesus proceeded to explain the real reason they were rejecting His claims: They did not have God's word in them. They were not receptive to God's truth, but had rejected the evidence from God Himself. And that is why they were rejecting Jesus. Had they been obedient to God, they would have received Jesus.

To reject those who have clear evidence that they come from God is to reject God and prove we are not following His word. If we are following His word, then we will accept those who can prove they are from God.

The same explanation applies today when people are shown what God's word says, yet they reject it. They have not rejected just the messenger who shows them the teaching. They have rejected God Himself because they rejected His message.

It is a contradiction to claim to follow God and yet reject His words. If God is God and we believe He is God, then we must accept what He reveals, when we have been given the proof that He has really revealed His will. God cannot be separated from His message; Jesus cannot be separated from His message. To reject God's message is to prove that we do not really believe in God Himself. The reason people do not accept truth, when it is clearly proved to be the truth, is that they do not really love and respect God. It is not the messenger they have a problem with, but God Himself.

Note how plainly Jesus here rebuked the Jews. To some extent, He could know His conclusion to be true, because they had rejected the plain evidence of His miracles. They had seen the proof, yet ignored it

and claimed Jesus was in error because He did not follow their man-made traditions. Such proves they did not have God's word in them. It is possible that Jesus spoke so also because He could read their hearts (2:23-25).

In any case, we are still relatively early in Jesus' public ministry and already He has entered into strong conflict with the Jewish leaders, in which He boldly rebuked their error. Jesus clearly did not sympathize with the modern view that preachers should preach a "positive" message that does not boldly confront sin.

5:39,40 - The Scriptures (fulfilled prophecy) as a witness

Now another witness is called to testify for Jesus — **Scripture**. The Jews searched the Scriptures, because they recognized them as the source of life. That is good, and we ought to do the same. The Scriptures give testimony of Jesus, and we can benefit from that testimony by accepting Jesus' will for our lives and so be saved (cf. Luke 24:27,44-46; Acts 2:25ff; 3:18ff; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; etc.).

How did the Scriptures testify of Jesus? By the prophecies, which He fulfilled. Hence, Jesus here makes the argument that they can know He is the Son of God, because He fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture. The accounts of Jesus' life are filled with examples of Old Testament prophecies that He fulfilled. Jesus had not cited any of them here, but they are cited in many other places.

The Jews, however, for all their professions of respect for Scripture, had ulterior motives (cf. vv 41,44; Matt. 6:1ff; 23:1ff; 27:18; John 12:41-43). Though they studied the Scriptures, they rejected the One to whom the Scriptures pointed. As a result, they did not have the life which the Scriptures predicted and which they hoped to have through the Scriptures.

Perhaps the Jews thought that they could have eternal life simply by observing the Old Testament law. But life was not in the Old Testament itself. As taught much more fully later, everyone under the law violated that law, and as a result, all stood condemned by the law (Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20). The law served to tell people they were sinners, but it could not really forgive the sins committed (Heb. 10:3,4; Acts 13:39). So, the law could not give life; it gave only condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). In fact, life truly came, not by the Old Testament law that the Jews trusted in, but by means of the One predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures (vv 21,24-26; 1:4). But the Jews had rejected the One who was predicted; as a result, they failed to obtain life in the only way their Scriptures could have led them to it.

We today ought also to use fulfilled prophecy as a proof of who Jesus is. If we so believe, we too can have life through Him (John 14:6). But if we reject the evidence of the Scriptures about who Jesus is, then like the Jews, we cannot have life.

5:41 - Jesus does not need human honor

This passage is best understood by comparing it to v44. The Jews glorified one another, instead of seeking honor from God. That is why they rejected Jesus. This is the sense in which Jesus is saying He did not receive honor from men.

He does not mean that men should not honor Him or that He would reject the honor if they truly gave it. His point is that, unlike the Jewish leaders, pleasing the people was not the goal He emphasized. He determined to do the Father's will (v30) regardless of what people thought, whether it be the Jewish leaders or anyone else. Failure to maintain this motivation is what led to the Jews' downfall (see notes on v44).

5:42 - The Jews' conduct showed they did not really love God

Jesus had the ability to read the hearts of men (John 2:25). As a result, He knew that these Jews did not have the love of God in them. He could also tell by their conduct, since those who love God will keep His commands (John 14:15,21-24; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6). Had they loved God as they should have, they would have obeyed Him.

Specifically, these were the reasons why these people were rejecting Jesus and opposing His work. They claimed to reject Him on the grounds that He broke the Sabbath and made Himself equal to God (v18). But that was not the root cause of their problems. Their problems were caused by an improper attitude toward God and too great a desire to please themselves and one another.

Note that it is important to establish the truth by evidence, as Jesus had already done. It is also important to disprove the arguments of those who disagree, as Jesus had also already done. But it is also important in teaching to challenge the root causes that keep people from accepting the truth.

Often the real reason people do not accept truth is, not that there is a lack of evidence nor that the evidence has not been clearly presented, but rather it is because their motives are not right. The problem is not evidence, but attitude. People generally make arguments to defend their view, but the real problem is they have motives for not wanting the truth (2 Timothy 4:2-4). This needs to be challenged.

5:43 - They rejected Jesus but accepted others with less proof

Jesus came in His Father's name — by His authority, acting as He directs, as His representative, having His stamp of approval and proof of authenticity (see vv 19,30; cf. Acts 4:7-11). He had given the proof of His authority by His miracles and other evidence He had just cited. Yet despite the evidence, they had rejected Him. This is what proves that they did not love God and their hearts were not right (v42). The prob-

lem was not lack of evidence, but an improper attitude toward evidence.

Yet the same people, in many cases, will accept men as being from God, even when those men have no such proof as Jesus had. Men might come acting in their own name — i.e., God had not given them their message, and they could not prove they were from God. Yet, the people would honor such men as being from God and would accept their teachings! Why was this so? Because the men said what the people wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:2-4)! In the case at hand, if men would honor the Jewish leaders, teach what they wanted to hear, meet their expectations, and play by their rules, then the Jews would accept them as good teachers despite the lack of evidence.

In truth, the Jews leaders themselves **were** the very kind of people Jesus was here describing: men who claimed to be from God yet had no proof of it. Yet, many people honored and accepted them as men of God. Meanwhile, the Jews would reject Jesus, despite the fact He had proved Himself to be from God. This shows the people had an attitude problem.

The principle of Divine authority

Note how this passage demonstrates the principle of Divine vs. human authority. As taught in many Scriptures, we must have God's authority in order to act in His service. In order to know we should not participate in an activity in God's service, we do not need a passage that specifically forbids the act. If God has not authorized an activity, then that alone is reason enough not to do it. See Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13.

Jesus here expresses this principle in terms of whose name we may act. He came in the Father's name — i.e., the Father authorized Him to teach and practice as He did. The Jews were wrong because they rejected what the Father had authorized. But Jesus went further. He said that they would receive one who came in his own name — i.e., one who acted by human authority without Divine authorization. His point is that these people would be just as wrong to follow someone who acted without Divine authority as they were to reject one who had Divine authority. So, Jesus Himself here proclaims the principle that we must not act by human authority without Divine authority. One who acts on his own authority is wrong, and the rest of us must not follow him. Furthermore, we should not "receive" him — do not encourage him or accept him as having Divine approval. Cf. 2 John 9-11.

For further discussion of our need for Bible authority, see articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

5:44 - The Jews honored one another, but rejected true honor

Jesus was not amazed that the Jews rejected and disbelieved Him. How could they possibly believe, when their motives were not right? They were seeking honor and praises from men and from one another, patting one another on the back, rather than being primarily concerned about pleasing God. People with such motives will necessarily reject truth on some critical point(s), and that is exactly why these people had rejected Jesus.

Other passages show that the desire to please men was a common problem with these Jews (cf. vv 39,40,41; Matt. 6:1-18; 23:1-12; John 12:42,43; 2 Cor. 10:12,18). We need to take warning and make sure our own motives are pure. Jesus was primarily concerned about pleasing His Father, and that likewise must be our goal. Otherwise, we too will be led astray like the Jews.

Note again that today, as then, there will be people who will argue as if the reason they disagree with a teaching is that they find some fault in it according to God's word. Yet when evidence is shown to prove the teaching is in harmony with God's word, they will continue to reject it. The problem in such cases is not that the evidence is weak or unclear. The problem is the motives and attitudes of the people. Until those change, no amount of evidence will produce obedience. We need to understand this in our teaching (see notes on v42).

5:45-47 - The writings of Moses testified regarding Jesus

The Jews had argued that Jesus was wrong because He disobeyed the Sabbath command, which had been taught by Moses. They rested their case on the teachings of Moses (or so they pretended). Jesus here responded by himself appealing to Moses and showing that Moses did not justify their views. On the contrary, it was the teachings of Moses that showed these men were in error!

Jesus said He was not the one (i.e., not the only one or even necessarily the main one) accusing them of being in error. The people did not need to take Jesus' word for it that He was from God and these Jews were in error. He had other evidence. Moses himself — the very one in whom they all trusted and claimed to follow — was the one who accused them! How so?

Moses had predicted the Messiah and prepared the people for his coming. Jesus had fulfilled these predictions; so, in rejecting Jesus, the Jews were also rejecting Moses. See for example Deut. 18:15-19 and compare to Peter's comments in Acts 3:22ff. Consider also the promise God made to Abraham, recorded by Moses in Gen. 12:1ff, and fulfilled by Jesus (Acts 3:25,26). The Book of Hebrews also shows how Jesus thoroughly fulfilled the Old Testament types and shadows. This illus-

trates what Jesus meant when He said that the writings of Moses and the Scriptures testified of Him (v39).

To truly accept Moses, therefore, all of us must accept Jesus, since Jesus fulfilled these prophecies about the coming Messiah, prophet, etc. But if, like the Jews, one claims to believe in Moses and yet rejects Christ, then such an one stands condemned, not just by what Jesus says, but also by the testimony of Moses.

Note how Jesus concludes His defense to these Jews by showing that, not only did His position not contradict the commands of God, but neither was it in conflict with Moses' teaching. Contrary to the Jews' ideas, both the Father and Moses approved of Jesus.

This also, incidentally, shows that Jesus approved of what Moses wrote. Jesus in fact claimed that Moses' writings proved Him to be who He claimed to be. Though Jesus removed the law given by Moses, there was no conflict between Him and Moses. They worked in harmony according to God's plan. If someone today denies the inspiration or accuracy of anything Moses wrote, therefore, he is also contradicting Jesus, just as surely as rejecting Jesus would constitute rejecting Moses.

Finally, note the skill of the Teacher in using the evidence accepted by His opponents to show how that very evidence proves the opponents to be wrong and the Teacher to be right. We should use this approach in teaching as well. Often those who oppose what we teach are themselves in contradiction to the authorities they appeal to. They claim that certain authorities prove their view is correct; but properly used, those same authorities may often demonstrate that in fact the position taken by those very people is in error. If so, it is effective to point this out, especially since they have already accepted the authority.

And once again note how plainly and boldly Jesus rebuked error. When people teach like this today, they are often accused of not having "the spirit of Christ," or not being "Christ-like." Those who make such accusations prove that they do not even understand the spirit or nature of Christ. He Himself clearly believed in rebuking sin firmly.

John 6

Chap. 6 - The Feeding of the 5000 & Teaching about the Bread of Life

6:1-13 - The Feeding of the 5000

(Cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17)

6:1-3 – A multitude follows Jesus across the Sea of Galilee

John records many events and details that are not recorded by the other writers, but the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle (other than those associated with His death and resurrection) that is recorded by all four writers.

Events in chap. 5 had occurred in Jerusalem. Some time must have intervened since then, as the events recorded here happened later (“after these things”) in Galilee. Jesus left with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee, which is here also called the “Sea of Tiberias.” This presumably means they went to the east side of the sea. There He went up on a mountain.

Matthew 14:13 says he went to an uninhabited place, and adds that He did so because He heard that John had been beheaded. Mark’s account (6:31) shows another reason He did this was so they could rest. The apostles had just returned from a preaching trip (Luke 9:10) and He thought they could all benefit from a rest, but so many people were around that they could not even meet their own needs.

However, they were unable to rest, because the people, having seen the signs or miracles He had accomplished, were determined to follow them. Mark adds that Jesus viewed them as sheep without a shepherd, so He taught them.

6:4-6 - The multitude needs to eat

The events recorded here occurred near the time of the Passover, which would mean it was spring. This also implies that much time had passed in John’s account, indicating that many events had occurred meanwhile that John did not record. In 2:13, Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for a Passover. In 5:1 He had been there again for an unnamed feast. Now the Passover was again drawing close.

Jesus questioned Philip as to where they could buy bread to feed so many people. But actually he was just testing Philip. Jesus already had a plan how He intended to feed the people. How was this a test? Perhaps the purpose was simply to challenge them to think about the

magnitude of the task, so that they would be even more impressed by what Jesus was about to do. Jesus often asked questions, not for the purpose of obtaining information, but to make a point.

Matthew adds that this happened after the people had stayed with Jesus for a long time, and when evening came they needed food to eat. It is unclear, by comparing the accounts, who first brought up the matter of feeding the people, Jesus or the disciples.

6:7-9 - Philip and Andrew discuss the problem of providing food for the people

Philip said that they could not feed that multitude with 200 denarii worth of bread, if everyone was to have a little. A denarius is thought to be the typical wage for one day's work. If so, 200 denarii would be a significant amount to spend. Some have suggested that this was all the money that the apostles had among them, yet Philip says it would not be enough to provide everyone with even a little to eat. Matthew's account says the disciples recommended that Jesus send the people to the villages to buy food. Whatever else this tells us, it shows the huge size of the crowd and the extreme difficulty of feeding so many.

Matthew records that Jesus told the disciples to give the people food to eat. Andrew said there was a lad who had five loaves of bread and two fish (apparently enough for his own lunch). But he was convinced this was nothing considering the size of the crowd.

Once again, John makes sure that we have sufficient details about the miracle to be sure that it could not possibly have occurred by any natural means.

6:10,11 - Jesus feeds the people using the boy's lunch

Jesus had the disciples give Him the food, then He had the people sit on the grass. Other accounts add that they were to sit in groups of 100's and 50's.

He blessed or gave thanks for the food before passing it out. This practice is often mentioned before meals in the Bible, especially the gospel. In fact, one would be hard put to find an example of Christians eating when they did not first give thanks. Prayer and thankfulness should be a regular part of our lives, and before meals is an especially good time to be thankful.

Jesus then distributed to the 12 who in turn gave to the people. Coffman shows there is a symbolic significance in this. What Jesus here did with physical food is what He also did with spiritual food. He is the source of the truth, but it is distributed to the people through his inspired agents. These men dispense nourishment to our souls, even as they did the physical nourishment on this occasion.

We are here told that there were 5000 men present. Other accounts add that this did not count the women and children.

In addition, we are told that everyone received as much as they wanted. So the miracle did not involve giving each person just a small portion. Their need was met, not minimally, but to the point of complete satisfaction. Such provision for such a huge crowd could not possibly have come from just the food provided in the boy's lunch.

6:12,13 - The remnants gathered

To further impress on us the greatness of this event, so we will know it could not be possible by natural means, John adds additional details. All the people were given as much as they wanted (v11), and they ate and were filled (v12). It was not the case that some just watched or just ate a little. Everybody ate his fill.

Then the remnants were gathered, and twelve baskets were taken up. But they had started out with just a few loaves and fishes. After all the people had eaten — 5000 men, not counting women and children — there was far more food left than at the beginning! In fact, the remnants were many times greater than the original amount.

John makes sure we have sufficient details that we cannot possibly wonder about what happened. There can be no doubt that Jesus multiplied the food many times. He who made the world at Creation, created the plants and animals with the ability to multiply and provide our food. But that takes natural process over considerable time. But here He did the same work in an instant of time, without the benefit of natural law. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that this is impossible by natural means and therefore a great miracle.

6:14 - The people conclude that Jesus is the Prophet to come into the world

John then described the effect of the miracle on the people: they concluded Jesus was “the Prophet” (cf. 1:21). This almost surely refers to the prophet predicted by Moses in Deut. 18:15ff. Jesus had here miraculously provided the multitudes with food, much like Moses had (by the power of God) fed the people with manna in the wilderness. V31 shows without a doubt that the people made this specific comparison.

Other prophets had also miraculously provided people with food, especially Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 4:1-7,42-44). The people recognized that Jesus had done a miracle that clearly required supernatural power, so they concluded He had to be a man sent from God.

Once again, we see here the purpose of miracles, and John's purpose is recording the miracles. Miracles demonstrate Jesus' great power and confirm the truthfulness of His claims that God was with Him. This particular miracle also proves His power to provide for the needs of His people. It shows He believes in being thankful for our food, and it also shows that He did not believe in being wasteful.

6:15-21 - Jesus Walks on the Water (Matt. 14:22-33 Mark 6:45-56)

6:15 - The people determine to make Jesus a king

When Jesus had worked this great miracle, His popularity among the people was so great that they wanted to make Him a king by force. This almost surely means they were willing to use violence to rebel against the Roman rulers and set Jesus as their king instead of the foreign oppressors (not that they intended to use force against Him to compel Him to become king). Throughout their history, the Jews had fought to obtain or keep their independence from foreign powers. In particular, Moses had led them to take the promised land by defeating their enemies in military battle. If Jesus was the Messiah, the prophet like unto Moses, He could likewise lead them to conquer their enemies.

This shows the kind of kingdom the Jews expected and wanted their Messiah to establish: an earthly kingdom like that of David and Solomon. Jesus' great miracle convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah and would make a great king. They were willing to achieve that end by military means (cf. John 18:36).

And the expectation these Jews had is exactly the same expectation that premillennial folks still have. They say Jesus failed to set up His kingdom when He came the first time, so they are expecting Him to do it when He returns. They are as determined that Jesus be an earthly king as the Jews were here.

Jesus, however, refused to accept this course of action, and instead He left alone to the mountain. Contrary to the plans of the Jews and of modern premillennialists, Jesus did not come to be an earthly king and rule His enemies by physical domination. Had this been His intent, this would have been just the situation He was looking for. Why did He refuse it? Interestingly, premillennial folks say that the reason Jesus could not set up His kingdom was that the Jews rejected Him and killed Him. In fact, however, the Jews would have gladly accepted Him, had He been willing to set up the kind of kingdom premillennialists expect Him to set up. But one of the main reasons the people rejected was that He refused to be an earthly king when they tried to make Him one!

In fact, by the time the chapter is over, Jesus had refused repeatedly to satisfy the physical, earthly, material interests of these followers. As a result, whole multitudes refused to follow Him any more. Why so, if He came to be an earthly king and satisfy people's physical desires like Jews and premillennialists claim.

The same applies to the claims of many modern faith healers. They say Jesus came to do miracles to satisfy the physical needs of the multitudes. If so, why did He cease to do miracles when the people so obviously wanted Him to continue to do so? He could have had a huge

following that would have been any faith healers dream, yet He refused. This whole chapter makes no sense at all, if these people hold the right view of Jesus' purposes.

On the other hand, the Bible says that Jesus' kingdom is spiritual and is the church. It began on the day of Pentecost, just as God always planned. Its purpose is not physical, earthly dominion, but the eternal salvation of souls. Jesus' emphasis throughout His ministry was on man's spiritual needs, not physical (see v27). This is why He did not satisfy people who emphasize material interests. Properly understood, this is the only sensible explanation to the events of this chapter. (See John 18:36; Col. 1:13,14; Matt. 16:18,19; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 3:10,11; 5:22-26; Acts 2:47; 20:28; etc.)

For in-depth studies of premillennialism and the nature of Jesus' kingdom, see our articles about those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

6:16-18 - The disciples face a tempest on the sea

Other accounts say that Jesus sent the disciples across the Sea of Galilee in a boat, sent the multitudes away, then He went up into a mountain to pray. Note how often Jesus went to His Father in prayer. Prayer was a continual and powerful force in His life, and He often sought privacy so He could use His time in prayer more effectively.

At this point Mark says Jesus sent the disciples to Bethsaida, John says toward Capernaum, and both Mark and Matthew note that they landed at Gennesaret (Mark 6:45,53; John 6:17; Matt. 14:34). Several possible explanations show there is no contradiction. Gennesaret is a region or area including both Capernaum and Bethsaida (the Sea is sometimes called the Sea of Gennesaret). It may be that the ship belonged at or was going to Bethsaida, so the 12 landed there and then planned to go by foot to Capernaum (or vice-versa). Perhaps they had business first at Bethsaida and then went on to Capernaum, etc.

The disciples launched out, evidently in the evening or night sometime, but Jesus remained behind. The sea became quite contrary and the disciples were having a difficult time crossing. A great wind was blowing. Such storms are quite common on the Sea of Galilee and can arise quite suddenly. Many of these men had made their living by fishing on this sea, so they knew as well as anyone how to deal with such a problem.

6:19,20 - Jesus walks on the sea

Other accounts say this happened in the fourth watch (3 AM to 6:AM). When they were about 3 or 4 miles from shore, Jesus came walking on the water. Mark adds Jesus would have passed them by. We are not told why. Perhaps it simply means He was going faster than

they were and the result would have been to pass them, had He not slowed down to approach them.

In any case, it is amazing enough that He could even stand on the water. That we might know without question the impossibility of this event by natural means, we are told they were 3 or 4 miles toward the middle of a sea. The disciples knew this sea well and were well aware that no one could possibly stand there. And yet Jesus was able, not only to stand without sinking, but even to walk and move faster than the boat did!

The disciples saw Him and could think of no explanation other than it was a ghost (Matthew's account). So, they were frightened and cried out. Jesus, however, comforted them assuring them it was simply He, and telling them not to be afraid.

Other accounts tell us that Peter asked to be allowed to duplicate what Jesus was doing. He wanted to walk on the water to Jesus. Jesus granted the wish and Peter began walking on the water to Jesus. Despite initial success, Peter began to see the wind and the sea and he began to sink. He called out to the Lord to save Him, which Jesus did. However, Jesus rebuked Him for His little faith and His doubting.

We might criticize Peter for his lack of faith. However, the other disciples did not even attempt what he did, and likely most of us would not either. And often we fail in what we do attempt for the same basic reason that he did — lack of faith.

6:21 - Jesus enters the boat, and the journey ends

Other accounts state that, when Peter and Jesus entered the boat, the wind ceased. Then the apostles worshipped Jesus for His power, saying he was the Son of God (Matthew's account). We are told that they then immediately arrived at their destination.

Once again, note how the writers carefully give us sufficient details that we cannot successfully deny that a miracle occurred. Many want to say this event was just a legend. But such a view accuses the witnesses of simply lying. They say they were in the middle of the sea, and in a storm at that. Jesus walked to them and could walk faster than they could row. Peter also walked on the sea briefly, and Jesus saved him when he sank. These men were experienced sailors on this sea and would not have been fooled by fakery. Their only other explanation was that they were seeing a ghost. Yet when they realized it was Jesus, they were so amazed that they worshipped Him. Furthermore, as soon as Jesus entered the boat, the storm ceased and they arrived at their destination.

This miracle teaches several things:

(1) As with all miracles we see the power of Jesus, confirming His claims and His teaching as being from God.

(2) We see His power over the elements. He created them, so surely He can control them. He can use them in ways no mere human could ever do.

(3) We see His power to save. Just as He could save Peter from the sea, so He can save us from sin. When we sink in sin, as we all do, we must appeal to Him to save us.

(4) We see that failure in God's service is due to a lack of faith. As it was in Peter's case, so it is whenever we fall into sin. If we had faith, enough we could endure every challenge. We sin when we lack the faith and fail to remain faithful.

6:22-71 - Teaching about Proper Priorities and the Bread of Life

6:22-24 - The multitude seeks Jesus

The next day the multitudes realized that Jesus was gone. They had seen that the disciples left, but Jesus had not entered the boat. Since there was no other boat, they had apparently assumed He was still there, so they had not left. However, other boats had come near the place, so they apparently concluded that He had left. So, when they finally realized He was really gone, they also took boats and came to Capernaum looking for Him (perhaps the point is that they left in the boats from Tiberias).

This confirms that the leaving of Jesus was miraculous or at least unexplainable to the people.

The rest of the chapter deals with their motives in following Jesus and the instructions He gave them as a result.

6:25,26 - Jesus rebukes the people for not valuing the real meaning of His miracle

The multitude found Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum (see v59). There they asked Him when He had come there. This was a natural question. However, Jesus ignored it and went on to the question that was of greater importance: their ***motive*** for seeking Him. These people had seen His miracle of feeding thousands. As we will see, they wanted more such food. Knowing their hearts (2:24,25), Jesus knew their motives. The subsequent discussion demonstrated that He was correct about their motives.

The fundamental point of the miraculous feeding – as with all of Jesus' miracles – was that it proved Jesus to be the Son of God in whom they should place their trust that He could save them from their sins. But the people were not interested in the spiritual significance of this sign. They sought a means of material gain, prosperity, and advancement of their goals for an earthly kingdom. Their view was that, if Jesus could so provide food, He could surely provide everything needed for a powerful kingdom of great material prosperity. But this

was not why Jesus had come, so He had refused to let them make Him king and had left (v15ff). Now they found Him and immediately wanted physical provisions again. They had an attitude problem, and Jesus dealt with it in no uncertain terms.

Such events ought to teach us not to be surprised when people today still try to make the kingdom of Jesus into a pursuit for physical and material benefits. Premillennialists still insist that He came to establish an earthly kingdom and, having failed to do it because the people rejected Him, He will come again and do it. And they still view that kingdom as an earthly paradise of incredible material, earthly prosperity. But this passage shows that Jesus could have set up an earthly kingdom when He came the first time, had He wanted to. The people wanted it and were willing to follow Him to that goal. They rejected Him because He **would not do it!** It is just the opposite of what premillennialists say.

And still others follow Jesus for “loaves and fishes” — material benefits. Faith healers promise people physical healing and solutions to all kinds of earthly problems if they will just send a donation to the faith healer. So, the faith healer views the message of Christ as a means of material gain for himself. And he succeeds only because the people who follow him also view the gospel as a means of their own material benefits, healing, and prosperity. And all of this occurs because these people, exactly like the people in John 6, see mainly the material benefit to come from miracles. They still fail to recognize the real spiritual purpose of miracles.

Again, modern “Social Gospel” advocates, both in denominations and in “churches of Christ,” say the church must minister to people’s physical needs and interests in order to attract them to the gospel and salvation. So, churches offer welfare programs, entertainment, recreation, parties, fun and games, kitchens, gymnasiums, plays, camps, and, of course, physical meals. This, we are told, will draw the crowds, then they can be taught about Jesus. Yet, in this passage Jesus Himself refused to do the very thing that Social Gospel advocates claim we ought to do today! He could have had huge crowds to teach, had He continued to feed them. But He refused and the crowds left! Once again, He did the opposite of what people today say ought to be done.

This context does not primarily relate to the church, but with Jesus as an individual. Yet, the principle has some relationship to the reign of the king (v15). Above all, it teaches us what should be important to Jesus’ followers.

Why then did Jesus even feed the 5000 to begin with, if He did not want them to become interested in physical food? His point here is that it was a miracle — a sign that showed to them that His claims were true. They should have seen in it evidence that He was the Son of God who could tell them how to live for God. When He had given the sign,

its purpose was accomplished and did not need to be continually repeated. When people wanted it repeated just for their material gain, they demonstrated that they had missed the point of the miracle they had seen. If they saw nothing higher than the physical benefit of the miracle, then there was no point in giving more miracles. So, Jesus refused to do more for them.

Note it carefully. Miracles were done only when they would achieve the higher purpose of giving people reason to believe in Jesus, in God, and in God's inspired message. When that purpose would not be served, miracles were not done. This ought to prove once and for all that the physical benefit (or harm) done by a miracle was never the main point of doing miracles. And when people today think that the physical effect was the main purpose of the miracle, they make the same mistake for which Jesus severely rebuked this multitude.

6:27 - Spiritual food must take precedence over material food

This is just one of numerous passages showing us that spiritual concerns ought to be far greater to us than material, earthly interests. This issue of priorities — what is really important in life — is an issue repeatedly discussed in Scripture. See Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; 4:16-18; John 6:63; Luke 12:15-21; Colossians 3:1,2; Matthew 6:19-33; 10:34-39; 16:24-27; 1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6-19.

Jesus here used “food” to represent that which we pursue as essential or important in life. Food is a necessity. These people wanted Him to provide it for them free. But Jesus said that material food is not as important as “food” which provides eternal life, referring to those things that are essential to achieve spiritual goals. Just as “daily bread” in Matt. 6:11 stands for all physical needs, so “food” here stands for whatever we consider to be essential and important goals in life. In many ways, the discussion is similar to the discussion with the Samaritan woman about living water in John 4.

Physical bread is needed. Jesus does not deny that, and other passages show it is proper to work for it (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10, etc.). But these people were so interested in it that they missed what was really important: the spiritual significance of Jesus' miracle. When material interests become so important that we fail to recognize or fulfill spiritual concerns, then our priorities are wrong and the principle of this verse rebukes us, just as it did these Jews.

Physical interests are relatively unimportant because they perish. No matter what they are, they are temporary and pertain to this life only. Someday they will cease to be of any concern at all. But spiritual interests will affect us for eternity. The pursuit of spiritual goals will lead to eternal consequences. That is why they are more important.

Jesus can provide for these spiritual necessities and blessings, just as He had provided the food for the 5000. They should have seen that

in His miracle, but instead they saw only the physical gain they could get from Him.

Jesus was “sealed” by the Father in that the Father put His stamp of approval on Jesus. A seal, in that day, was an official validation, like a signature on an official document today. The Father validated Jesus’ claims and demonstrated that Jesus had power from God to provide for the people’s spiritual needs. He did this by miracles, such as the feeding of the 5000.

Hence, the people should have seen the miracle as a “seal” or proof that Jesus was from God and could provide for their spiritual needs. Instead, they saw it only a means of physical gain and sought more such material benefits. Jesus recognized this, rebuked them, and refused to do as they wanted.

Examples today in which people overemphasize physical interests are numerous. Under v26 (above) we listed some. Other examples are people who are too wrapped up in making money, enjoying pleasure, sports and recreation, parties, physical beauty, earthly power and fame, etc. None of these are inherently wrong of themselves. The Bible never teaches us to have no concern for them. But any or all are wrong when they become the main goal of life or when they hinder our fulfilling the spiritual requirements Jesus wants us to emphasize.

Note that Jesus here makes clear that we must “labor” to obtain the food that is essential to eternal life. Most people realize that we must work to obtain physical necessities. But many believe that eternal life can be obtained by “faith only” without obeying Divine commands. Jesus here makes clear that receiving eternal life does indeed require doing work.

6:28,29 – The people ask about working the works of God

The Jews had not really understood or been convinced by Jesus’ teaching. But He had told them to work for the food that abides to eternal life, so they asked Him, in effect, how to do that: what should they do to work for God? We will see that they were still hoping that the answer they received would result in a way for them to obtain material gain. In effect, they were asking what they could do to get Jesus to continue to give them physical blessings.

But instead of telling them how to obtain physical benefits, Jesus gave a spiritual answer. The work God wanted them to do was to believe in Jesus, whom God sent. This called their attention back to the issue. What God wanted, and what He had sought to accomplish by the miracle, was to get the people to believe in Jesus. That is what they needed to do to receive eternal life (cf. v27; 3:16; etc.). They had ignored the real purpose of the miracle and had sought material advantage. So, when they asked how to work for God, Jesus called them back to the need for faith. This is not the only work God requires. But in

many ways, it is the most basic one, and especially here it was the one these Jews needed most.

Faith as a “work.”

Note that Jesus Himself said that believing in Him is a “work.” 1 John 3:23 confirms that believing is a command we must obey. It is folly, therefore, for “faith only” advocates to argue that there is nothing to do to be saved, you don’t have to obey commands or do any works, just believe in Jesus! If you don’t have to do any works or obey commands, then you don’t have to believe, since believing is plainly taught in Scripture to be a work or command we must obey. But if we must work this work to be saved, then works are essential to salvation. The only question that remains is to learn what other works, if any, are essential.

Some say the “work of God” means it is a work God does in us — we believe because He chooses for us to believe. However, (1) 1 John 3:23 still says believing is a command we must obey. (2) They had asked what must “we” do that “we” may work the works of God. Jesus was telling them what man must do, not what God does. (3) Compare the expression “work of God” to 1 Cor. 15:58, which tells us to continue in the “work of the Lord.” It is not the work God does, but the work He has appointed for us to do. (4) If our believing is entirely the work of God, then He would be responsible for those who do not believe and are therefore lost eternally. But Jesus said many will be lost, so that would make God a respecter of persons who saves some but not others.

Hence, Jesus here proves there is something for people to do to please God. Faith here refers to obedient faith, and it requires other acts of obedience in order to be a true saving faith, as discussed in John 3:16 (see notes there). The question then is simply what work is required.

For more information about salvation by faith only vs. obedient faith, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

6:30-33 - The people seek manna like Moses had given

Jesus had said the people should believe in Him, but they were not willing to give up their idea of seeking material benefits. So, they asked Him to do a sign so they can believe in Him. If God expected them to work for Him (vv 26-29), then they wanted Jesus to first do a work for them. And they were even willing to volunteer a suggestion for the kind of sign they would like: they reminded Jesus that Moses gave them manna. Lo and behold, they were right back where they had been at the beginning of the discussion: they wanted food to eat! This is exactly where Jesus had said they were, and this is exactly what He had rebuked them for — they wanted miracles to provide physical food! (See on vv 26,27.)

Note the audacity of the people. First, they were repeating the very error Jesus had just rebuked them for. But just as bad, immediately after Jesus had shown them a great miracle, they came to Him and called for another miracle so they could believe. If they would not believe when He first miraculously gave them bread, why would they believe if He gave them more bread? And they not only wanted a miracle, they wanted to be able to decide for themselves what kind of miracle God should give!

Jesus first corrected a misunderstanding. The manna Israel had received in the wilderness ultimately was not from Moses but was from the Father in heaven. Like all miracles, God provided it, not primarily to meet their need, but to cause them to believe in God and in God's messenger Moses. If they were going to ignore the essential purpose of miracles, there was surely no reason for Jesus to do another. And further, God is the giver, so God gives what He believes to be best for the people. It is not up to the people to tell God what gifts to give, when, or why.

The bread from heaven

Then Jesus explained the blessing that the people really needed and that God had chosen to give. It was "bread" from heaven, but not the physical bread like manna they were pursuing. The "bread" was the One whom God had sent to provide life for the world. This, of course, was Jesus. Jesus is the "bread" throughout this discussion that people must "eat" or partake of. They do this by believing in Him with an obedient faith. If they do so, He provides for them spiritually and gives them eternal life just like physical food sustains physical life.

The people were still thinking physically instead of spiritually, so they missed Jesus' point completely and the discussion broke down till they finally ended up rejecting Him and leaving Him. But the critical issue throughout the rest of the chapter has been defined here: spiritual issues and needs vs. material ones.

6:34-36 - Jesus as the bread of life

Jesus had said that the Father gives bread from heaven and gives life to the world, so the people asked to receive this bread always. They were obviously still thinking in terms of physical or material gain. And they were not satisfied with the one time Jesus fed them. They wanted food all the time (evermore – KJV)!

V35 is a key verse in understanding the whole discussion. Jesus told them what the bread is that they must eat, and He told how they should partake of it so as to meet their needs. Later in the chapter He spoke again of people eating His flesh and drinking His blood (vv 52-55). Some think that refers to the Lord's Supper; but when you understand the context it becomes clear that the reference is not primarily to the Lord's Supper.

What is the bread: Jesus plainly stated, “I am the bread of life” (cf. vv 48,51). And He is not only food, but also drink, for those who partake of Him will never hunger or thirst. We must both eat His flesh and drink His blood (vv 53ff). There can be no successfully denying it: the bread Jesus here refers to is Jesus Himself.

In what way is Jesus like bread? Compare to vv 27,32,33. The bread of life is that which comes down from God in heaven (like manna — vv 31,32,49) and gives men what is necessary for them to have eternal life (cf. vv 33,40,47,50,51). Physical bread is a gift from God (James 1:17; Matt. 6:11) that provides what is necessary to physical life. Likewise, the bread of life (Jesus) came from God in heaven to provide what we need for spiritual and eternal life.

What does He provide that we need in order to have eternal life? Mainly He provides forgiveness of sins by His death on the cross (v51). But He also gives instruction regarding how we can receive forgiveness (vv 44,45) and how we should continue to live to remain in God’s favor — the words of eternal life (vv 63,68). Associated with this are hope, joy, peace, and all the blessings that come with being forgiven and having the hope of eternal life (Eph. 1:3). Compare this to the discussion in John 4 about Jesus as the water of life.

What did He say we must do to partake of this bread? If we believe in Him and come to Him, we will never hunger or thirst. Hence, we partake of the bread by believing in Him and coming to Him (obeying Him). We eat the bread by becoming Christians and remaining faithful to Him. This requires us to first learn about Him (vv 44,45), by the words of life (vv 63,68).

When we believe in Jesus and obey His word, our sins are forgiven and we partake of the life He offers. As we continue to believe and to live in His word, we continue to have the hope of eternal life. He provides all this, and we partake of it by serving Him according to His will. The Lord’s Supper is involved only indirectly in that it is a memorial to Jesus, who is the real bread of life.

These people had said they wanted the bread from God out of heaven; but Jesus knew they did not really want it, because they refused to believe in Him. We cannot have these blessings unless we believe in Him, and they refused to appreciate Him as the giver of spiritual blessings; instead, they insisting on material benefits. Jesus was again speaking spiritually and they, as they so often did, were thinking physically. This would lead them eventually to reject Him and desert Him (v66).]

Note that this is the first of many “I am” passages in John, in which Jesus uses some physical item to teach a spiritual lesson about Himself (“I am the vine,” “I am the good shepherd,” etc.). Watch for others as the book proceeds (8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). None of them were intended to be taken physically. All taught spiritual lessons.

6:37 – We must come to Jesus to receive His blessings

We partake of Jesus as the “bread of life” (and thereby have the hope of eternal life) by **believing** in Him and **coming** to Him (v35). But some people (such as these Jews) will not come because they do not believe (v36). However, all whom the Father gives to Jesus will come; He will not cast them out but will raise them up (vv 39,40).

This is not teaching unconditional Calvinistic predestination. The Father has not unconditionally chosen certain individuals, regardless of their character, conduct, or will, and compelled them to accept Jesus regardless of what they want. He has simply declared what **kind** of person can and cannot come to Jesus.

Compare vv 44,45. Those who come to Jesus are those whom the Father draws to Him, and these are the ones to be raised up. But **how** does the Father draw them? He draws them when they **hear, learn, and are taught from the Father**. Then they must **believe** (v40). So, it is by the message of the gospel that the Father draws people and gives them to Jesus. God has determined that He wants to give to Jesus the kind of people who are willing to listen, understand, and have obedient faith. Here Jesus implies that these Jews would not be included, because they did not believe in Him (v36).

Many other passages say that God wants all men to be saved, so Jesus died for all and the gospel is to be preached to all (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4,6; John 3:16; Heb. 2:9; Mark. 16:15,16; Matt. 28:19). It is this gospel that calls men to Jesus (2 Thess. 2:14). The gospel is the word of eternal life (John 6:63,68).

Hence, the Father has chosen to give to Jesus all men who are willing, in response to the gospel, to demonstrate obedient faith. God wants all men to do this and has offered the gospel to all. But the only ones who are given to Jesus are the ones who (by their choice) choose to believe and obey, thereby coming to Him.

These are not cast out, but this is not talking about whether or not they can ever be lost. Many verses show that it is possible for a child of God to so sin as to be lost (see notes on John 3:36). The point is that Jesus will not refuse to accept any who come to Him in obedient faith, having been thereby given to Him by the Father. These unbelieving Jews would not come. But those who are willing to come need not fear rejection. All who will meet the conditions will be received and accepted. Those who will not meet the conditions are the ones who will be rejected. And this may include some who first become His disciples, but then turn away from Him.

For further information about election and predestination and about “once saved, always saved,” see our articles about those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

6:38-40 - Jesus came to do His Father's will and give eternal life to those who believe

Jesus had not come to do His own will, but the will of the Father. This does not imply that their wills would otherwise conflict and differ. Jesus possessed Deity, so He and the Father and the Holy Spirit are in complete agreement in all things. But on earth Jesus was also a man who had come to learn (experience) obedience. He had totally submitted Himself to obey His Father like we must (see notes on 5:19,30).

What was the Father's will? The Father had willed that Jesus not lose any of these ones whom the Father had given Him. All who truly believe (obedient faith) in Him would receive eternal life and be raised up at the last day (obviously, by implication, the resurrection of life — 5:28,29). This is why He would not refuse to accept anyone who would come to Him according to the Father's will (v37). To refuse such a one would be to condemn him to be lost. Jesus could not do that, because it would not be in harmony with the will of the Father whom He came to please.

Again, the fact the Father does not want any of these to be lost does not mean it is impossible for them to be lost. As in 3:36, these can so sin as to be lost (see notes there). But God does not **want** this, just as He does not want **anyone** to be lost (2 Peter 3:9; etc.). Yet, He must allow it when people return to sin even after conversion. The eternal condemnation of any soul is contrary to the desires of the Father, but neither He nor the Son will force salvation on anyone.

The point here is that **Jesus** is not going to be the cause of such people being lost. If they are lost it will be the result of their own doing, not because Jesus did not desire to accept them or in some other way rejected them. Jesus is not here discussing what can possibly happen to the people if they change their minds and become unfaithful. He is just discussing the fact that He Himself will follow the Father's will. Note that the very context itself specifies conditions men must meet to be saved: they must see Jesus as He is, must believe in Him and come to Him (vv 37-40) by obedience. Jesus cannot accept people contrary to these conditions. But He is willing to receive all who will meet the conditions. Hence, if men are lost, it will not be Jesus' fault or because He failed to do as He should.

The expression "see the Son" also has a spiritual emphasis and carries the idea of truly seeing the real significance of who He is. It requires recognition of the truth of His claims and a willingness to accept them as truth. Only then can one really see the Son. When one believes in Jesus (obedient faith) on the basis of this understanding, then He can have eternal life. (Cf. 12:45.)

And also note how Jesus here plainly states that He has come down from heaven. This claim too is often repeated in the book of John and especially in this immediate discussion (vv 33,38,41,50,51,58).

And how can it be true, unless He is much more than just an ordinary man. Nor is He an angel, so He must be Divine.

And note also how He again plainly states that He has the power to raise men from the dead (cf. 5:28,29). Who could have this power except God? While Jesus does not here directly state His Deity, properly understood his words can mean nothing less.

And finally, Jesus' reference to the "last day" is also common in John. It refers to the Day of Judgment on which all men will be raised from the dead. This shows that the ultimate reward, for which Jesus' true disciples work, is not a physical blessing to be received in this life (like the food the people sought). Rather, it is a blessing in eternity after this life and after death. To receive it requires a resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is trying every way He can to get the people to see that His purpose here is spiritual and pertains to eternal life and man's relationship to God. They completely miss the point when they emphasize physical food. And so do all others who fail to understand the spiritual nature of His life, His gospel, and His kingdom.

6:41,42 - The Jews doubt Jesus' heavenly origin

These Jews, just as Jesus had said, began to show their unbelief. They objected to the fact He said **He** was bread come down from heaven. Remember, they wanted physical blessings when they asked for bread from heaven. When Jesus did not give that but instead offered Himself, they began to lose interest. He was offering something of infinitely greater value than what they sought, but they were not interested.

In particular, they objected to His claim to have come down from heaven (vv 33,38). This was a claim to Deity or at least to divine origin. But the Jews claimed He could not have come from heaven, because they knew His family, his father and mother. In this they assumed that His father was Joseph, so how could God be His Father and how could He have come from heaven (cf. 4:44; 5:18)? To them, He was just a physical man with a physical origin.

Their error, of course, was that Joseph was not Jesus' physical father, but only his adopted or earthly father. Jesus' real Father is the Father in heaven. He had been born of Mary by the miracle of the virgin birth so that Joseph was not really His Father (see Matt. 1 and Luke 1). Jesus is in reality eternal and Divine, having existed from eternity, created all things, and then come to earth in the form of a man (John 1:1-3,14, etc.).

But the people did not believe, mainly because they were looking for the wrong thing. They had seen His miracle; had they appreciated the miracle, they should have believed His message. Their skepticism shows they wanted something other than the truth from a messenger from God. They wanted food and an earthly kingdom – physical,

earthly benefits. They saw in Him a physical man, they knew His origin (they thought), He did not give what they wanted, so they began a course that led them ultimately to reject Him altogether.

6:43-45 - Jesus states the circumstances under which people can follow Him

Jesus responded telling them not to so murmur among themselves. Then He simply returned to further discussion of how people come to Him. He had said they had eternal life and would be raised up at the last day (thereby partaking of Him as the bread of life) if they would believe (see vv 34-40). He here proceeds to show how people believe and thereby come to Him.

They cannot come to Him and be raised up unless the Father draws them. He draws them, as predicted in the prophets (Isa. 54:13), by being taught by God. So, Jesus said that those who come to Him are those who hear and learn. Note that those who do not hear and learn cannot come. This was the application to these Jews. They did not want Jesus' spiritual message. They wanted physical food and an earthly kingdom. As a result, they would not listen to the teaching, so they could not become true disciples.

Jesus' statement takes the mystery out of how the Father draws people and how He gives them to Jesus. It is done by the message of the gospel, which message is to be preached to all in the world (see notes on v37; cf. 12:32). The gospel is the power of God to save those who hear it and believe (John 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16; 10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20). In so explaining, Jesus was telling these people that the bread and life He was describing were not physical. He was also telling them what they had to do to receive it, which was what they had asked Him to tell them (v28). But they would not listen, so they rejected Him and His message.

Note the implications of these verses for the doctrine of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the word, in conversion of sinners. Jesus says here that the Spirit does not teach people directly nor come directly into their hearts apart from the word. Only by hearing and learning can they come to Jesus (see the examples of the eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius in Acts 8,9,10). The whole concept of Calvinistic election and direct action of the Holy Spirit in salvation is disproved here by Jesus' own direct statements.

Note also the consequences for the practice of infant baptism. "No one" can come unless they first learn and are taught. A baby cannot do this, so a baby cannot come. But then a baby does not need to come because he has no sins anyway (cf. Matt. 18:5).

6:46 - No one has seen the Father except Jesus

Jesus added that no one had seen the Father except the One (Jesus) who had come from the Father (cf. on 1:18).

Why did Jesus add this? Perhaps to clarify that His statements did not mean that people needed to personally or directly be taught by the Father. Nobody could personally experience Him in that way. Or perhaps He was simply emphasizing that He was the bread of life because He was the only One who had seen the Father and so could tell them about His will. They could not know the true will of God any other way except through Him. That is why they needed Him and that is why He is the bread of life.

Note again the very direct claim of Jesus to a special relationship with God that no one else has. No one else has seen God as He has, so no one could know the Father's will as He knew it. All such claims are blasphemous, unless Jesus is the Christ, God in the flesh. No prophet or apostle ever made such claims: only Jesus Himself.

6:47,48 - Jesus is the bread of life who can give eternal life to those who believe

These verses summarize and restate the points of vv 35-41 (see notes there). Jesus offers eternal life to all who believe in Him (cf. v40). He is the One who can give this life because He is the bread of life. Note that once again, as in v41, Jesus directly states that He is the bread to which He refers (cf. v35). He is the One that people must believe in to be saved. Once again, see the extreme character of His claims. Those who believe in Him can have eternal life! What mere man, even a prophet or apostle, would dare make such claims?

Again, the faith required is obedient faith (see notes on 3:16). And one "has everlasting life" as a promise or hope, not a present possession in this life (see on 3:36). Nothing here should be misconceived to teach salvation by "faith alone" or "once saved, always saved."

6:49-51 - Jesus is greater bread than the manna

This discussion had resulted because the Jews requested Jesus to give them bread from heaven like Moses gave manna (vv 30-34). Jesus here showed again that the bread He was offering them is both different from and better than the bread Moses gave. The point is spiritual bread vs. physical bread.

Those who ate the manna still died. It sustained them for a time in the wilderness, but they still died later. Those who ate of Jesus' bread would not die but have eternal life. He was offering them something far greater than Moses' manna, and they were rejecting it because they were thinking physically (vv 35-48).

Once again, Jesus clearly states that He is the living bread (cf. vv 35,41,48). And once again He clearly states that He came down from

heaven (cf. vv 33,38). He just continues making bold claims and refusing to back down.

Again, Jesus clarified that He was not talking about physical bread. The bread He offered is His flesh that He would give for the life of the world — i.e., His sacrifice on the cross (see notes on 3:16). This is what is necessary for men to be forgiven and have eternal life. And this is what men must “eat” (partake of). We do this by hearing about Him and believing. See notes on v35. The meaning is here clearly explained and should not be confused in vv 53ff with the Lord’s Supper.

6:52-55 - We must eat Jesus’ flesh and drink His blood

Jesus was trying to get the Jews to see the importance of their spiritual needs, instead of just thinking about their material interests. But they continued to think physically, so they could not understand how they could eat His flesh. So confused and upset were they that they actually quarreled among themselves about the meaning of Jesus’ statements.

Perhaps this relates to their knowledge that the Law forbade drinking blood or eating flesh with the blood still in it. But they are still missing the point of Jesus’ spiritual teaching.

He responded that, unless they ate His flesh and drank His blood, they don’t have life in them! He insisted that His flesh truly is food and His blood truly is drink; and if they would partake, they could have eternal life and be raised up at the last day.

This seems confusing only if we take it out of context or if we try to think physically like these Jews were doing. Jesus had already explained repeatedly that He is the bread of life who came from heaven to give His life for men, that those who partake can have eternal life, and that they partake by hearing His word, believing in Him, and coming to Him (see vv 27,35,41-51).

Hence, Jesus’ statements should not be taken as mysterious, mystical, or even very confusing. He is simply saying that we must serve Him to receive the spiritual blessings He offers. We must learn about Him, believe in Him, and obey Him; if we do, we will have the hope of eternal life and all other blessings that we need to receive that eternal life. This is just what is taught in multitudes of other passages. He speaks this way to these Jews because they were so insistent on emphasizing physical things, and he is trying to get them to emphasize spiritual things.

The Lord’s Supper?

Some people think Jesus refers here to eating His flesh and drinking His blood in the Lord’s Supper. The parallel is striking, but it just does not fit this context. The Lord’s Supper is nowhere here. However, the view we have presented is not only in the context, it is the whole point of the context. The Lord’s Supper is a **part** of serving Jesus, and

in fact it is a memorial to His flesh and blood by which we have eternal life. But it is by no means the main point He is making here.

In fact, there are dangers in thinking He is mainly referring to the Lord's Supper. Some think we literally eat Jesus physical flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper. Others seem to think all they have to do is eat and drink the Lord's Supper and they will have eternal life. They put little or no emphasis on spiritual things during the week, but they drop in for 15 minutes to eat the Lord's Supper on Sunday. They may even leave and ignore the rest of the worship. But they think they are all right, because they ate Jesus' flesh and drank His blood!

All such ideas are just a variation of the same error the Jews were committing. They were oriented almost entirely toward physical matters — an earthly kingdom, outward ritual and appearance, etc. Likewise, some pervert this passage to think, if they can just go through the physical ritual of eating some Lord's Supper, they can go on their way spending the rest of their lives emphasizing physical matters and still be pleasing to God. The passage is really showing that spiritual service to God must occupy our thinking and our lives if we are to have eternal life. And Jesus deliberately stated this in such a way that people who are not willing to be spiritually minded would reject His teaching.

6:56-59 - Jesus repeats the blessing of eating His flesh and drinking His blood

Jesus continued to emphasize the need to feed on Him if people are to live. Again, He said that His food is superior to the manna, because people who ate manna still died; but people who partake of the food He offers will live forever (cf. vv 31-34). Note again how this ties this teaching back into the previous discussion. There just can be no doubt that Jesus is continuing to say what He had said throughout the discussion.

He adds that, if we eat His flesh and drink His blood we abide in Him and He in us. Again, this is not physical. He is speaking spiritually, and it perverts His whole point to make this physical as a literal bodily indwelling.

What does it mean to abide in Jesus and have Him abide in us? Such expressions are used repeatedly in the Bible (especially John's writings) to describe the Father and Son dwelling in one another, them and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, us dwelling in them, etc. The clearest passages show that these expressions simply refer to spiritual fellowship or oneness, united spiritually instead of being alienated from one another. The point is that, in sin we are separated from God. When Jesus has forgiven our sins (i.e., when we eat of His flesh and drink His blood by believing and obeying Him), then we are united again with God (He abides in us, etc.). See John 17:20-23; 15:1-6; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 5:17; 1 John 1:3,6,7; 2:3-6; 4:14-16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20;

Rom. 8:9; Eph. 3:17; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3,4; John 14:10,11,20; 10:37,38; etc.

Can we have this fellowship just by eating the Lord's Supper? No. The Lord's Supper is a memorial that we can partake of, because we have the fellowship; as such, it is an outward expression of our fellowship (1 Cor. 10:16,17). But partaking of the Lord's Supper does not put us in fellowship. Believing and serving Jesus are what gives us access to this fellowship. Understanding this can make the Lord's Supper more meaningful. It is a memorial in which we symbolize the fact that we are in Jesus' fellowship, because have been eating His flesh and drinking His blood by serving Him. But the memorial itself is not what puts us into His fellowship.

Note that Jesus states again the He has come down from heaven (see on vv 33,38).

His statement that He lives because of the Father does not mean the Father created Jesus. We have already learned that Jesus is eternal (see on vv 1-3). Rather, the reference is the fact that the Father sent Jesus from heaven to earth to live as a man – see the first part of v57. This is the sense I which Jesus lived because of the Father. He came to earth to live as a man, because the Father sent Him (Hebrews 10:5).

Note that He proceeds to say that those who feed on Him will live because of Him. Does this mean that He will create them or physically bring them into existence? Does it mean those who don't feed on Him will not come into existence? Obviously not. They already existed, but He would give them life in a sense they did not already have. So, Jesus existed eternally, but the Father gave Him life on earth as a man so He could accomplish His purpose here.

We are told again that this teaching was done in Capernaum, in the synagogue.

6:60-62 - The people are offended at Jesus' teaching

Up to this point, it was the Jews who were confused by Jesus' teaching. But at this point even some of those who were disciples thought this was a hard saying that they could not understand. In reality, it is not so hard if you think spiritually and understand what Jesus' purpose here was all about. But if you think physically, which the disciples were also often guilty of, then it surely is confusing. And we have seen that some disciples still today stumble at Jesus because they are over-emphasizing physical things instead of spiritual.

Jesus could read their hearts (2:24,25), so He knew about their complaints. He asked if they were offended by His teaching. If so, how much more difficulty would they have if they saw Him ascend back up to heaven. They were stumbling because He said He came from heaven to give His flesh that the world might have life. This is not what even His disciples expected. They anticipated an earthly ruler who would provide physical benefits like those the Jews were requesting. They too

would find it hard to understand His spiritual emphasis. What if He were to leave and go back to heaven, as He eventually did without having established an earthly kingdom? Would they not find that even more offensive to their preconceptions? But if we understand His purpose here was primarily spiritual, we have no such problems.

6:63 - Jesus words give spirit and life. The flesh is unprofitable by comparison

This verse, along with vv 26,27, shows the main emphasis Jesus was trying to make, and also shows why the Jews had such trouble accepting His points. Physical things, in the long run, are of no great importance. What really matters are those things of the Spirit that pertain to eternal life. See references under vv 26,27 for other passages that make this point.

Physical life is not as important as spiritual life. Spiritual life can be achieved because Jesus eventually died to give forgiveness. The Spirit then revealed the meaning of all this in the gospel, which Jesus was already proclaiming. This was a spiritual message that can give spiritual life. This is what we need to emphasize.

It is essential that we appreciate the spiritual nature of Jesus' work and message. If we do not, then like the Jews we will end up rejecting some or all of His real value. We will pervert the purpose of the church or the purpose of our own lives. The result will be a material emphasis that will keep us from eternal life. See examples listed under vv 26,27.

This verse is critical in our understanding of Jesus' message here. He draws the message to a conclusion at the same point where He began it: by showing that His message and His purpose here was spiritual in nature, not primarily physical.

6:64,65 - Jesus knew that some claimed to follow Him but lacked true faith

Jesus again pointed out that some of them did not really believe. This was the real problem that caused them to reject His teaching. What is more, one of them would betray Him, and He already knew even who that was (see notes on vv 70,71). He knew the hearts of all men and knew what would eventually happen (2:24f).

It is folly to hold, as some do, that Jesus did not know the Jews would reject Him and had to change His plans when they did. He knew from the beginning who really did not believe, and He knew what would happen as a result. It was all part of the plan, not contrary to the plan.

Knowing some would not believe, He had said that no one could come unless it be granted them by the Father. See notes on v37. Again, the point is not unconditional predestination. The point is that God had predetermined that the only people who could come to Jesus were

those who heard of Him and believed in Him with obedience (cf. vv 44,45). No others will receive His blessings. He would like to have all men believe and be blessed. He offers the opportunity to all men, but each person must decide for himself what choice he will make. But Jesus knew some would disbelieve, and God's will requires that unbelievers cannot come to Jesus. And He knew what choices Judas would make, but He never compelled him to make those choices.

6:66 - Many disciples desert Jesus

At the conclusion of the discussion, not only did many Jews reject His words, but many disciples even ceased following Him. This was no doubt sad and difficult, for the Lord has feelings too, and He grieves over man's sins.

Yet, there is so much we can learn here.

(1) People, who at first seem interested in truth, often end up rejecting it. Some we try to teach will refuse to obey. But these were disciples! So there will be also disciples who will quit obeying. If it happened at the teaching of the Master Teacher, why should we think it would not happen when we teach the same truths? And why do people teach that it is impossible for a disciple to fall away and be lost?

(2) In fact, Jesus taught what He did **knowing** this would happen. He knew that many did not believe (v65) and that they were following Him from wrong motives (vv 26f). He deliberately and persistently confronted their errors, refusing to compromise or back down. The result was the loss of many disciples.

Yet, many people today repeatedly claim that it is wrong for preachers to preach as Jesus did here. If we continue to emphasize truths that we know are offensive and objectionable to people, and if as a result some people refuse to be converted or others leave the church, other people blame the preaching and say we "should not preach so hard." They want the message toned down or even compromised or silenced in order to keep the people.

Jesus clearly did not agree with the view of "positive preaching." He knew His message was offensive (v61), and the people thought He was preaching "hard sayings (v60), but He kept it up. Even after the people left, He did not apologize or try to draw them back, though He could easily have performed the kind of miracles they wanted.

His reason was that people could not be real disciples anyway, except on God's terms. If people will stay only if you compromise or change the truth, they are not real converts anyway and will not really be saved in the end. They are just a hindrance and a bad influence on others. They should be given clear teaching so they have the chance to repent; but if they persist in error, then it is better for everyone if they leave. Jesus knew this. We need to learn it.

Jesus' teaching was deliberately intended, not just to draw those who have the kind of hearts God is willing to save, but to also drive

away those who are not willing to become true disciples. This is a bitter pill for many people to swallow, but passages like this one and many others show that this is the deliberate purpose of the gospel.

(3) People are dead wrong when they say we should use carnal appeals to attract people to the church and then try to convert them. When people primarily pursue material interests, they will never be satisfied with spiritual emphasis. They will stay only if you continue the physical attractions. They will never become spiritual, but will just leave when you start emphasizing the spiritual. Jesus knew that, so from the beginning He emphasized the spiritual, and He let them leave when they showed they did not want spiritual teaching.

6:67-69 - Peter confesses Jesus and His word

Seeing that so many other disciples had left, Jesus then challenged the twelve whether they too would leave. Impetuous Peter came out a hero this time. He said (by a rhetorical question) that there was nowhere else to go. Jesus had the words of eternal life (v63), and they believed that He was the Christ, the Son of God (cf. Matt. 16:13-18).

In these simple, yet incredibly profound words, he stated the crux of the issue. The evidence (miracles, etc.) proved who Jesus is. If He is the Christ, why leave? Even if you don't understand some things He says, stay and study till you do understand. But only by what He says do you have hope of eternal life. If you leave, you lose all hope of that reward.

This is the point the Jews missed about the feeding of the 5000. It was not primarily about food to relieve hunger. It was proof of who Jesus was. Peter got that point, even though He may have misunderstood much else. No doubt John records this whole discussion and Peter's conclusion to convince us that we too need to believe who Jesus is.

Like the Jews, many people get this turned around. They examine Bible teaching and decide they don't like it or they find it hard to understand. So they reject it, regardless of the evidence of miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and the resurrection, proving that it is really the message of God. Instead, like Peter, we should approach it the other way around. If an honest examination of the evidence proves the message to be from God, then we ought to accept Jesus and His message, regardless of our difficulties in understanding it. Then we ought to study it till we do understand it.

Many other verses show our need to hear and accept Jesus' teachings in order to have eternal life. Jesus' message has the power to save from sin and give eternal life. Without that message, we are eternally doomed. (See vv 44,45,63; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 11:14.)

6:70,71 - Jesus reveals clearly that He knows one of them would betray Him

Despite Peter's confession, which clearly stated the truth, Jesus knew that even among the twelve one was a devil (accuser, slanderer). He was so like Satan that Jesus identified the two together. One would turn against Him and betray Him. We are plainly told that He referred to Judas Iscariot.

Again, as in v64, Jesus knew the end from the beginning. He knew the hearts of all men. He knew what the final result would be, and even who would help bring it about. In particular, like the other people in this context, Judas was too attracted to material things, not appreciating spiritual things and eternal life. In the end he betrayed Jesus for money, but he was a thief long before that (12:4-6).

The gospel of John repeatedly demonstrates the error of those who think Jesus did not know ahead of time that He would be rejected and killed. He not only knew that He came to die, He knew the details of how it would happen and who would bring it about!

Yet this does not prove God compelled Judas against his will to be evil. Judas was a free moral agent with the power to choose, just like Adam and Eve and all the rest of us. But Jesus knew his heart and knew from the beginning what choice he would make (2:24,25).

John 7

Chap. 7 - The Feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem

7:1-13 - Discussion Regarding Jesus' Attendance of the Feast

7:1,2 - The Feast of the Tabernacles approaches

For a period of time, Jesus remained in Galilee, rather than Judea, because He knew that the Jews there still wanted to kill Him (see 5:18).

However, the time came for the Feast of Tabernacles. At this feast people lived in booths, or temporary dwellings, as a reminder of the time when the Israelites lived in such circumstances after leaving Egypt (Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-16; note vv 33-36,39-44). The feast lasted a total of eight days – seven days of living in booths, followed by a great assembly. It was one of the three annual feasts that all males were expected to attend, and was also a time of celebration of the harvest. As such, it involved much rejoicing and happiness.

7:3-5 - Jesus' brothers urge Him to attend the feast

Jesus brothers wanted Him to go to this feast and publicly prove to the people who He was. They said that, if He wanted to be publicly accepted, He had to act publicly and not remain in secret. Jesus had become increasingly well known and had developed a reputation for miracles. His brothers apparently believed it was time for Him to step out into public and demonstrate the evidence for His claims in the most prominent place He could do it: in Jerusalem at a feast that would be attended by Jews from all over the nation and the world.

Yet they themselves did not believe on Him at this time. They may not have been openly antagonistic, but they at least harbored doubts. They were not confident He was who the crowds were saying He was. Perhaps they hoped He would convince them too. Or maybe they felt the family reputation was suffering because He made these claims but did not (in their eyes) convincingly prove them. Maybe the public exposure of the feast would settle the matter one way or the other. These brothers did later become believers and were influential in the early church – Acts 1:14.

Note that Jesus did have brothers. They must have been physical brothers, for they were surely not spiritual brothers, since they did not

believe on Him. This proves Mary was not a perpetual virgin after Jesus was born. See notes and references on John 2:12.

Some have claimed that Jesus' brothers were numbered among His apostles, but these verses indicate that is not so. The apostles had been chosen long before this, and even at this point His brothers were unbelieving.

7:6-8 - Jesus explains that the time is not yet right for Him to make this public demonstration

Jesus explained that it was not yet time for Him to publicly manifest Himself in Jerusalem. He knew the world hated Him because of His teachings (i.e., they wanted to kill Him — v1). Eventually He would have to face them and be killed, but it was not yet time for that.

This reasoning did not apply to His brothers, however. They could go to the feast with no opposition or hatred, so He encouraged them to do so. There was no danger to them, because the world did not hate them. The world opposes, not its own, but those who dare to be different. Jesus was hated, because of His opposition to the sins of the "world." But the brothers did not have this problem, because they were not yet convinced to follow Jesus' example of opposing the world. Probably the brothers did not understand the significance of Jesus' statement.

Note that Jesus did not compromise with sin. He plainly rebuked it, even if that meant people wanted to kill Him. Some people believe that Christian love requires us to keep quiet about sin and not tell people they are wrong. They say it is not "Christ-like" to condemn other religious people. Had Jesus held this belief, He could have avoided the kind of opposition He faced. He faced hatred and opposition because He did rebuke sin (cf. Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). See notes on 6:66. Is it "un-Christ-like" for us to do as Christ did?!

Some translations have Jesus saying that He was not going up to the feast. See notes on v10.

7:9,10 - Jesus goes to the feast after the others had gone

Jesus remained in Galilee awhile. But after the brothers had gone to the feast, He also went up. But He went up secretly, not publicly. He did not take a large multitude of followers, openly declaring who He was. He went up quietly with no fanfare or other means of attracting attention. In short, He went, but not the way His brothers wanted Him to go.

In some translations, v8 has Jesus saying He would not go up to the feast. How could He go after saying He would not go? NKJV and other translations add the word "yet" (see ASV footnote). Hendriksen argues that there is as much evidence for this translation as for excluding the "yet."

Or perhaps Jesus meant He would not go up in the *manner* the brothers wanted Him to go. He did not go and make a major spectacle to invite the crowds to examine the proofs of His claims. He went, but secretly, not openly. Or perhaps His comment meant that He would not go for the *whole* feast (which lasted seven days). V14 implies He went up in the middle of the feast.

The idea that Jesus would not go “yet” is implied, even if there is no word for “yet” in the original. Jesus is discussing the time of when He would (or would not) go. He had said, “I am not going” – i.e., at the present time I am not going – that is the significance of the Greek. This did not deny that He would go later. So, the time element is involved in any case, implying He would not go at the present time. To go later would not contradict His statement. In any case, there was no intent to deceive.

7:11-13 - Confusion and disagreement about Jesus among those at the feast

Many Jews at the feast apparently also expected to see Jesus. They looked for Him and wondered where He was. His teaching and works had caused much interest among the people, both for Him and against Him. The people remembered things He had done at earlier feasts (chap. 2,5). They anticipated learning more about Him, and perhaps were eager or fearful of what might happen at this feast.

He was surely the topic of many conversations and much disagreement. Some claimed He was a good man, but others said He was deceiving the people. But no discussions were conducted openly, because people feared the Jews. They knew the Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus. It is stated later that these leaders had declared that anyone who believed in Him would be put out of the synagogue. Statements like this demonstrate how powerfully the Jewish leaders controlled and censored even what the people discussed.

Note again that Jesus was clearly not an inoffensive character who avoided at all costs stirring up controversy or disagreements. Everywhere He went, people formed strong views about Him, pro or con. This often caused division among the people, and this division will be mentioned in succeeding chapters. As Christians, we should not enjoy strife; but we will find that if we stand up for Jesus’ will, we too will often be a center of controversy.

And notice again that the people discussed the two basic alternative views of Jesus. If He is not who He claims to be, then He is a fraud and deceiver. In that case, He is not good at all. There is no point in claiming to believe in Jesus as a “good man,” while denying the claims He made and allowed others to make that He is the Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh.

7:14-52 - Discussions at the Feast

7:14-16 - Criticism of Jesus' lack of formal training

About the middle of the feast, Jesus began to teach in the temple. It seems that, at first, He did not identify openly who He was nor announce His presence to His disciples. So people did not seem to recognize Him. Even so, it was a bold thing to do, knowing the rulers wanted to kill Him.

The people were amazed at His teaching since He had never learned letters. This means He had not gone to any of the special Jewish schools for religious teachers. He had no “seminary” training. People today also tend to think that every preacher must have seminary training (cf. Acts 4:13). If a religious teacher lacks formal training, some people will automatically reject his teaching as lacking in authority or credentials. However, what guarantee is there that the seminary teaches the truth? Neither Jesus nor most of His apostles had formal training. Why then should people insist that preachers today have formal training?

Jesus responded that He had not originated what He taught, but it was given Him by the One who sent Him (the Father in heaven, though Jesus did not yet mention this). The same fact explained the apostles' ability to teach. They were not teaching human ideas, so they did not need training in human schools. Their doctrines came from God, so all they needed was to know His will.

The same is true today except that, where Jesus and the apostles received information by direct revelation, we receive it from the Bible. If a person today studies and knows what the Bible teaches, that is all the training he needs to be a teacher of God's word. So, the issue is whether or not a man teaches what God has revealed. The way to determine whether or not a man speaks the truth is, not by his formal education, but by comparing His teaching to Scripture (Matthew 7:15-23; Acts 4:13; 17:11; Galatians 1:6-10; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

If individual Christians choose to operate schools or colleges, that may be fine, depending on how it is done. But there must never be any requirement that training at such schools is necessary for a man to be considered qualified to preach to God's people. Nor should people accept the teaching of a man because he has attended some school. A man's work should be evaluated in terms of whether or not he understands and teaches what God says in the Bible.

7:17 - The importance of an honest desire for truth

Jesus then explained a necessary requirement for someone to know whether or not His teaching came from God. Contrary to what the people were wondering, the real issue here was not **how** Jesus learned these things. The real issue was whether or not He was teaching what God said. Was it from God or not?

As so often is the case, people raise issues that are not essential. As teachers, we need to do as Jesus did and turn the conversation to the issue that matters. What does it matter what the teacher's background is? The issue is whether or not he is teaching the truth!

If someone wants to know whether or not a teaching is true, he must **will to do** God's will. Often people reject truth because other things are more important to them than doing God's will. They are not really devoted to serving God as the number one priority in life. They prefer to do please themselves, please loved ones, pursue wealth, pleasure, etc. (see notes on John 3:19-21).

Such people may not admit or even realize what their real problem is. When confronted with God's will, they may make excuses for rejecting it. Like these Jews, they may say the teaching cannot be right, because the person who presented it is not qualified enough to speak on the subject. They may say, "My preacher says that's not the way it is, and he was trained at XYZ seminary." Hosts of similar excuses can be given. ("People can't understand the Bible alike anyway." "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." etc.)

But a fundamental reason why many people reject the truth, is that they simply are not devoted enough to really **doing** whatever God wants them to do. If you are willing to accept the truth, whatever it may be, and make whatever changes God may require of you, no matter what the cost, then you can learn God's will for your life. Otherwise, sooner or later, His word will say something you don't like, and you will reject it.

Note the consequence of this to people who argue that it doesn't really matter whether we obey God, as long as we believe in Him. Jesus is here saying that, if you are not totally determined to **do** God's will, you may never even really **know** the truth, let alone believe it. If a person believes that you don't have to obey God, that very attitude itself keeps many people from even **knowing** what the truth is!

7:18 - Teachers must also teach from proper motives

Not only must the hearers of God's word have proper motives, so also must the teachers. Instead of seeking their own glory, exaltation, and other selfish goals, they must seek the glory of the one who sent them.

One of the greatest dangers for teachers is having the wrong motive for our work. If hearers are not devoted to doing God's will, they may never learn the truth. Likewise, if teachers are not devoted to exalting God and His will, they may not teach the truth. And even if they taught the truth, but from a false motive, God would not bless them for their work.

Teachers must guard against a variety of impure motives. Some may teach doctrines to please the people, have a large following, and bring praises of men to themselves (2 Tim. 4:2-4; John 12:42,43; etc.).

Others preach for money to become wealthy, so they preach whatever doctrine they think will bring in large contributions (1 Timothy 6:5-11; 2 Peter 2:15,16). Others preach doctrines that justify their own pleasures and immoral conduct (2 Peter 2:13). To be sure he is faithful and will receive God's reward, a teacher must above all else be devoted to pleasing and honoring God, not himself or men (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6; 1 Corinthians 4:1-4).

Note that at times Jesus recognized the need to defend His own life, motives, and conduct in order to keep false accusations from leading people to reject what He taught. Sometimes we must do the same.

7:19,20 - Jesus introduces the issue of their attitude toward the law and their desire to kill Him

Having defending His doctrine and motives, Jesus proceeded to point out the real reasons people were rejecting His teaching. It was not, as they pretended, because of any lack of qualifications in Him. As always when people reject truth, the problem was in the hearers. Some teachers, even when they teach the truth, may demonstrate attitudes that turn people away from the message. But if the message is true, the people should be honest enough to accept it despite the faults of the messenger. However, when Jesus was the teacher, the people had no grounds whatever to find fault in Him or His message. The fault was entirely in them. The same is true when people reject Jesus' teaching today.

Jesus had already proved that Moses testified about Him, so if they truly were following Moses' law they would have accepted Jesus (5:46,47). But they were not keeping the law given through Moses. This was their real problem and reason for rejecting Jesus. Even the law that they admitted was from God, still they did not obey that law. What are the chances they would obey further revelation when it came?

In citing Moses' law, Jesus was laying the groundwork to return to a discussion of their earlier criticisms of Him, claiming that He had broken the Sabbath (see v23).

He then asked why they wanted to kill Him. The people responded by denying any intent to kill Jesus. So, they dismissed Him as being demon-possessed to even think such a thing. Perhaps they answered so because they did not remember the rulers' plan to kill Jesus. Or, perhaps this was a cover-up. If so, by v25 of this chapter they had it figured out. Or perhaps this was just a cover-up — surely they would not admit it if they did intend to kill Him. In any case, it has already been clearly stated that they did intend to kill Him (5:18).

Note how, when people are in sin and refuse to repent, they will often attack the one who reveals their error. In this case, Jesus had pointed out the failure of the people to keep the Law of Moses. Rather than acknowledge His criticism to be valid, they attacked Him as hav-

ing a demon. This is the same treatment sinful people gave to Old Testament prophets and to New Testament apostles and prophets. It is the attitude that often leads to persecution of faithful teachers. And we may as well expect it to occur today, for it surely will come if we stand for the truth (Matthew 5:10-12; 13:21; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 8:17-39; 2 Corinthians 1:4-10; 4:17; 7:4; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1,15-19; 5:10).

Note further that it is proper, at times, not only to defend our own teaching and conduct, but also to point out the errors of those who oppose the truth. This chapter begins a series of confrontations between Jesus and these Jews. Many object to such debating and confrontation, especially when a teacher begins to pointedly demonstrate that his opponents are in error. Yet, Jesus did it and so should we.

7:21-23 - Jesus again defends His act of healing on the Sabbath

Jesus had asked why they wanted to kill Him, and they had implied that they sought to do no such thing (vv 19,20). However, the last time He had been in Jerusalem, the Jews had sought to kill Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. See notes on 5:10-18. Jesus here returned to that event and again defended His conduct. In so doing, He showed they were in error, while simultaneously reminding them that they did seek to kill Him.

First, He pointed out the miraculous nature of the healing. It caused them to marvel, and they ought to have believed in Him as a result. The very act for which they had condemned Him was a miracle – a miracle of healing. The purpose of miracles was to prove that a man spoke a message from God. If Jesus said it was right to heal on the Sabbath while doing a miracle, the miracle proved that God confirmed His message. So the very act that the people criticized had proved, of itself, that healing on the Sabbath was not wrong. Yet, the people completely overlooked the significance of the miracle and sought instead to kill Jesus.

Jesus then appealed again to their supposed respect for Moses' law (v19). They claimed to follow Moses, especially in his command about the Sabbath. But Moses also gave a command about circumcision (though it was actually given first to the fathers such as Abraham – cf. Gen. 17). The Jews gave great respect to the circumcision ritual, just as they did for the Sabbath. Circumcision was the sign a man was a Jew and one of God's chosen people. No one dared oppose this practice among the Jews.

But the circumcision command required a male child to be circumcised on the eighth day. This was a medical procedure. If that day fell on a Sabbath, they circumcised the child to obey the law. They did not refuse on the grounds that it was a medical procedure and involved

“work,” nor did they condemn people for doing this work on the Sabbath.

Jesus’ point was that the Sabbath law did not forbid circumcision on the Sabbath, and they all knew that. In the same way, it did not forbid other forms of medical treatment and care for the sick. What Jesus had done in healing on the Sabbath was no more a violation of the Sabbath than circumcision would be. Yet, the people accepted the circumcision on the Sabbath, while condemning Jesus to death for healing on the Sabbath.

Again, Jesus was showing that the Sabbath law was never intended to forbid all forms of activity that anyone could classify as “work.” Some needs and services rendered to others took precedence; they were exceptions to the Sabbath law, and everyone realized they were not forbidden. Hence, for the Jews or anyone today to argue that Jesus broke the Sabbath law is to completely misunderstand the facts. What He violated was, not God’s Sabbath law, but rather the Jews’ human traditions about the Sabbath law.

7:24 - Judge righteous judgment

In condemning Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, the Jews had judged Him unrighteously. They were judging according to external appearance, not according to truth. It may have appeared on the surface that He had violated the Sabbath, but a righteous view of the event would have shown that he had not sinned. This statement shows again that what Jesus had done, when viewed properly (righteously), was not a sin.

Note that Jesus did not say that all judging was wrong. Many people today, whenever sin is condemned (especially their own sins), will say that Jesus said, “Judge not!” But Jesus never condemned all rebuking of sin. On the contrary, He and His apostles rebuked people frequently, and He commands us to do the same (see Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Prov. 10:17; 15:31-33). Those who use the principle of “judge not” to condemn everyone who rebukes their sins, need to reckon with Jesus’ statement here in John 7:24. He here commands us to “judge with righteous judgment.”

Nevertheless, there are principles we should follow when “judging.” It must be “righteous,” not according to appearance. This includes at least the following principles:

(1) Judging must be based on the real facts of the case, not on outward appearance. We must be sure we know what really happened and why, not just what may seem to have happened.

(2) Judgment must be based on the standard of God’s word, not human doctrines, man’s wisdom, or personal opinions (Matt. 15:1-14; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Gal. 1:8,9; Prov. 17:15; Rom. 14:1-4,10-13; etc.) When people have sinned according to God’s word, they need to be told they

have done wrong. But people are not guilty of sin simply because they violate human tradition, man-made laws, or our own personal opinions. What Scriptural teaching is involved?

(3) Our own lives must be consistent with our judgments. If we condemn others for practices that we ourselves commit, then we condemn ourselves in condemning them (Matt. 7:1-6,12). This does not mean we should not rebuke the sin, but it means we need to clean up our own sins first (Rom. 2:1-3,17-24).

(4) We must speak from proper motives, sincerely seeking the well-being of everyone involved, not just to exalt self or win an argument or get vengeance on one we think has hurt us, etc. See 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; James 3:14-18; 1:19,20; Rom. 12:17-21.

In their criticism of Jesus, the Jews violated these principles of righteous judgment. In the first place, they were condemning Him on the basis of their own human traditions, nor on the basis of what God's law really said. In the second place, they did things on the Sabbath that were just as much "work" as what Jesus did, yet they realized their acts were not wrong. To condemn Jesus, when they did similar things, was unrighteous judgment.

We today must take care that we properly apply the principle that Jesus states here, whenever we rebuke other people for sin.

7:25,26 - Questions regarding why the rulers did not confront Jesus

Interestingly, some of the people now remembered that this is the one the Jews wanted to kill! When Jesus had first mentioned this idea, they had, in effect, denied it (vv 19,20). But after He challenged their judgment of Him and showed that not all work on the Sabbath was sinful, they remembered that some had sought to kill Him. Note that those who remembered this were from Jerusalem, where the miracle of healing on the Sabbath had occurred. Perhaps the previous denial had been initiated by visitors from out of town who came for the feast. But as the discussion proceeded, people from Jerusalem recognized Jesus based on His actions at previous feasts.

Then the people observed that He was speaking openly and boldly and nothing was being done to stop Him. So, they wondered if even the rulers knew He was the Christ. The implication is that, if they could prove He was not the Christ, they would stop Him, probably by killing Him as they intended. Since the rulers did nothing, could that mean they thought He might be the Christ?

Actually, the rulers were about to take action (see v32). Perhaps He had been gone from their territory so long, and had just recently returned, so they were not fully aware of Him yet. But other passages also show that they were hesitant to act because they feared the people. Furthermore, they feared causing turmoil that might cause the Romans to intervene in their affairs, especially during a feast.

Note that, when religious leaders allow people to teach without actively opposing them, others will likely assume that the leaders endorse the teaching. This may not be correct, as in this case, but people will still think it. That is why the church, for the sake of influence and reputation, must take care who we allow to preach and teach in our assemblies and classes. If people, who are known to hold erroneous views, are allowed to teach unopposed, people will assume the church accepts the view. Cf. 2 John 9-11.

7:27 - Questions regarding Jesus' origin

Jesus' origin seemed to create serious problems for some people (see. 6:42; 7:41,42). They knew He was from Nazareth, and they knew His family. This caused some of them to stumble, because they did not see how such a great leader could come from such humble origins. Others knew the Christ would be a descendant of David from Bethlehem, so they rejected Jesus because He was from Galilee (see notes on vv 41,42,52). Still others seemed to think the Christ would just appear to take leadership with no known origin at all (cf. Dan. 7:13?).

Actually, Jesus fulfilled all prophecies regarding His origin, but the people were just ignorant either of what the prophecies meant or else of the facts of Jesus' origin. Specifically, He did, in a sense, appear from unknown origins, for He was from heaven and was eternal. He came to earth as a man miraculously, but had existed from eternity before that (John 1:1-3,14). But the people were ignorant of all this (cf. vv 28f).

It is interesting that the people were still making judgments based on appearance! They had no knowledge of Jesus' real origin or of the prophecies, but they were still jumping to conclusions, even after Jesus warned them not to.

7:28,29 - Jesus responds to the doubts about His origin

Jesus dealt briefly with the issue of His origin, though He had told them about this before. He said, in a sense, they did know where He came from. They knew His physical family, and He had also told them before of His ultimate heavenly origin.

But the real problem was they did not believe in His heavenly origin. They did not realize that He had not come from Himself — i.e., by His own authority. He had come from the Father. But they rejected Him, because they did not know the Father. They had not been faithful in serving God, so they did not recognize one who came from Him.

Jesus knew the Father, because He had been with Him from the beginning (John 1:1) and had come from Him. He had given the evidence for this the last time He had been in Jerusalem (5:16-47), but the Jews had rejected it. Jesus did not repeat it in detail here (or we are not given the detail), but He did repeat the claim of His origin.

7:30,31 – Some seek to capture Jesus, but others believe in Him

Jesus' sayings stirred some people up to oppose Him, as had happened the last time He had been in Jerusalem (chap. 5). But they could not capture Him, because His time had not come. This must surely refer to His time to die. That would come soon, but not yet. In the meantime, it appears that God was protecting Him, so He could complete His earthly work before dying. Of course, Jesus had miraculous power to avoid them taking Him, if it was necessary for Him to use it. Perhaps this is what He did in this case; or the proceedings may have appeared to occur by natural means, though God was actually in control (providence).

But some people in the crowd did believe in Jesus. And on what basis? His miracles! They were impressed by His signs and did not believe that even the Christ could do more or greater miracles than Jesus had. John here again gives us testimony of Jesus' miracles based on the admission of the people. Note that the people here testify that Jesus had done great miracles. See introductory notes for a more complete list of John's evidence regarding Jesus' miracles.

King observes that the miracles of Jesus would be especially striking to the people, since there had been a period of 300-400 years prior to His coming in which there had been no prophets. John the Baptist had preceded Jesus, but even he did no miracles. This would make the miracles of Jesus all the more striking. However, no one before or since did as many great miracles as Jesus. How could anyone doubt that He was the Messiah?

Notice again how the conclusion that people reached was determined by how they approached the evidence. When people would begin with an honest examination of the evidence of miracles and fulfilled prophecy – the evidence Jesus had appealed to – they were convinced His claims were true. But other people started by comparing His teachings and actions to what they expected according to their preconceived ideas, meanwhile ignoring the evidence of miracles, etc. These people were the ones who rejected Him. We today must likewise take the right course. Start with the evidence, not with our preconceptions of what teachings or works we think ought to characterize God.

7:32 - The Jewish leaders decide it is time to act

Meantime, these events came to the ears of the Pharisees – the ones most determined to destroy Jesus. They heard what the crowd was saying about Jesus. No doubt, they were especially upset by the fact some people were coming to accept Him. Nothing upset them more than when they feared they would lose influence and honor in the eyes of the people. This was the main reason they viewed Jesus as a threat (Matthew 27:18).

In any case, they decided to take action and sent officers to arrest Jesus. The result of this effort is discussed further in vv 45ff.

The reference to the Pharisees and chief priests may mean that this referred to the Sanhedrin council. They had not acted before, leading some people to wonder how they viewed Jesus (v26). However, they had finally heard enough that they decided to act.

7:33,34 - Jesus predicts that He would soon go where they could not follow

Jesus then gave the people still more to contemplate. They had doubted Him, because of their view of His origin. He had said He had been sent by Someone else (obviously the Father — vv 28,29). He then proceeded to say that, in a little while, He would go back where He came from — to the One who sent Him. They would seek Him but not find Him.

To understand that He came from the Father, of course, is to realize that He was saying He would go back to the Father in heaven. He would be among the people yet a little while. But His death and the end of His earthly life and work were drawing close. Then He would leave them in death. Though He would come back in the resurrection, He would ultimately ascend to the Father miraculously (Acts 1). We understand this in light of what eventually happened.

The people could not go there because they were not dead yet. Besides, if they were not faithful, they could not go there when they died unless they repented. Perhaps this refers also to the fact that, even when we die, we do not go to Heaven but to the place of waiting till the judgment (Luke 16:19ff).

7:35,36 - The people wonder about Jesus' statements

Jesus' statements had really confused the Jews. They had thought they knew where He came from, though they did not understand where He ultimately came from. Then they were really confused when He said He would go back and they could not go there. They wondered if He intended to go teach the Greeks among the dispersion.

The word for Greeks here refers to Greek-speaking Gentiles. It is not the same as the word for Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews in Acts 6:1, etc. Because Greek was the universal language of the day, Jews often described Gentiles - anyone other than Jews - as being Greeks.

These Jews seems to be implying that, if Jesus was going where they could not come, He must be going among the dispersed Jews and there teach Gentiles. Perhaps this is a form of derision, as though if He could not teach the Jews and get them to accept Him, He would have to teach Gentiles to find a following. Of course, Jesus did eventually save Gentiles, but not at all as these Jews had in mind.

7:37 - Jesus offers spiritual drink to those who thirst

This is similar to 6:53-58 (see notes there). There Jesus had told the Jews that He was the bread of life and could give them eternal life if they would come to Him. However, He also said they could drink of Him (see also 4:10ff).

The point, explained in that context, is that Jesus gives us what we need spiritually so we may receive eternal life, just like physical food and drink provide what we need for physical life. Coming to Jesus is explained as simply meaning to learn of Him, believe on Him, and serve Him.

These events happened on the last day of the feast, the great day. The feast lasted several days, while the people lived in tabernacles (see references under 7:2). The feast was about to end. Jesus had taught the people and stirred up their thinking since He had come to the feast, as the context shows. But the discussions were about to end when the feast would end.

7:38,39 - The rivers of living water explained

Not only did Jesus say people could drink of Him, He said further that believers would have rivers of living water flowing from within them (from their hearts). This was spoken of, He said, in the Scriptures (see similar ideas in Isaiah 55:1; 58:11; 44:3; Psalms 36:8,9; Prov. 10:11; 18:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8). He explained this as referring to the Holy Spirit, who would be received by those who believed in Jesus (cf. Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28-32). This would not occur till after Jesus had been glorified and the Holy Spirit had been given (apparently meaning the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2:1ff). Regarding Jesus' glorification, note John 11:4; 12:16,23; 13:31.

There are several possibilities as to what this could refer to. (1) It could mean that some of His followers would be inspired, receive spiritual gifts, and be able to speak God's word to others. Hence, the Holy Spirit (i.e., His message and truth) would flow from their hearts to instruct others.

(2) It could mean that believers would receive the Holy Spirit by being taught and obeying the word of the Spirit (John 6:44,45; Eph. 6:17). The Holy Spirit would then dwell in them, meaning they would have fellowship with the Spirit and all the spiritual blessings that accompany it (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19,20; see notes on Acts 2:38). The blessings the people received, because they were saved and had received the Holy Spirit, would be like well of life within them, springing up to meet their spiritual needs.

(3) Related to #2, believers would receive the Spirit and would then teach the Spirit's word to others (not by inspiration, but simply because they had learned it, like we do today).

#1 and #3 seem to agree with the idea that the Spirit would flow from the person. But #2 seems to agree better with the Old Testament passages Jesus apparently refers to. Further, the context might imply that this was something to be received by all believers, which would eliminate #1 since not all believers received spiritual gifts. On the other hand, this promise could not be fulfilled till the Spirit came after Jesus had been glorified, and this seems to imply #1 is correct.

It is hard for me to determine which of these views is correct. However, all of them harmonize with the teaching of Scripture elsewhere. The only issue is which Jesus means here.

Note that coming to Jesus (v37) is again identified with believing on Him (vv 38,39).

7:40-42 - Division among the people

Jesus' teaching caused considerable stir and difference of viewpoint among the people. Different people expressed different views of Jesus, just as the disciples had described to Jesus in Matt. 16:15ff. Some people said He was the prophet, probably the one predicted by Moses in Deut. 18:15 (see notes on John 1:15; cf. Acts 3:22f). Others said He was the Christ. Actually, He was both, since the prophecies all referred to the same person.

However, some people could not believe He was the Christ, because Jesus came out of Galilee and the prophecies said the Christ would be of the seed of David from Bethlehem. They were correct in their understanding of Scripture (Micah 5:2; cf. 2 Samuel 7:11-14; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Psalms 18:50; 89:4f, 36), but wrong in their knowledge of the facts of Jesus' case. He was born in Bethlehem of the seed of David (see Matt. chap. 1; 2:1; etc.). He grew up in Galilee after Joseph moved the family there to be safe from Herod (Matt. 2).

Here is another example of the Jews' making unrighteous judgments (7:24). They did not have the facts of the case, but they could easily have learned them had they put forth the effort to do so. Instead, they just made a judgment that satisfied their desires and rejected Jesus. (Cf. 7:27,31).

7:43,44 - Division results in an effort to capture Jesus

These verses describe the end result of the interaction between Jesus and the people: they were divided because of Him. As described in the previous verses, some believed that He was the Christ, but others denied it.

Many Scriptures show that Christians should not seek to cause division (1 Cor. 1:10ff; John 17:20,21; etc.). These verses mean that true believers in Jesus should not be divided among themselves. However, passages such as this and many others show that division followed Jesus and His apostles almost everywhere they went. People were often alienated from one another because of their teaching (cf. Matt.

10:34ff). Paul was forced to leave almost every city where he taught, because people opposed His teaching.

The Bible is not saying that we should compromise the truth in order to have peace and avoid division. It is saying that we should not cause division, because we preach error or because we bind our own opinions instead of God's truth or because of our unkind attitudes (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10). But truth will always cause division whenever there are some people who will not accept it. Those who believe the truth will be divided from those who do not.

We will see this pattern repeated again and again in the book of John (as in other books). It becomes clear that the gospel is intended to separate those who are willing to submit to God from those who are not. This is not an accident, nor is it something we can or should avoid, provided it results from sinful attitudes of other men who reject God's word. Those who are responsible for the error are those who prefer false teaching. We must make sure we are not the ones who are responsible because of our bad attitudes or rejection of truth. See John 3:19-21; Matthew 13:13-17.

Some people wanted to lay hands on Jesus, but no one did so. This is the same as v30 — see notes there.

7:45,46 - The officers testify regarding Jesus' teachings

The rulers, being upset by what they heard about the effects of Jesus' teachings, had earlier sent officers to capture Jesus (v32). Here the officers returned having failed to arrest Him. When asked their reason, they said that no one had ever spoken like Jesus! Note that they had failed, not because they feared that Jesus or His disciples would overpower them, or even because they feared the people might get upset. Rather, it was Jesus' own teaching that hindered them.

They were obviously so impressed by His teachings that they did not fulfill their mission to arrest Him. This shows the amazing power of His words, if even the enemies sent to capture Him could not bring themselves to do so. These men were presumably soldiers or police officers. They would be hardened to the treachery and deceit of those who would seek to maintain their freedom or try to talk their way out of being arrested. Yet, experienced and hardened as they were, they still could not bring themselves, after hearing Jesus, to believe that He deserved to be arrested. This becomes indirect testimony, even from Jesus' enemies, of the great power of His teaching.

Doubtless, these officers did not understand the degree of truth of their statement. But indeed no man in history ever did speak as Jesus did. He is the greatest character in history, never equaled before or since. No one spoke as He did, because no one else was as great as He nor had as important a message as He. Do we appreciate the greatness of His words? Far too many do not appreciate His words, because they will not listen. Those who will honestly listen, even if they have been

enemies, may well be converted or at least become much more sympathetic.

7:47-49 - The Jewish leaders respond to the officers

The Jewish rulers asked the officers if they were being deceived by Jesus like other people were. This response demonstrated their arrogance and false standard for determining right from wrong.

On what basis did they conclude Jesus was a false deceiver? On the basis that none of **them** believed in Him! The rulers and Pharisees did not accept Him, so how could He be right? They viewed themselves as the educated, informed, spiritual leaders. They were the authorities to determine right from wrong for everybody else! Other people should just accept their word that their conclusions were right. If they believed a thing to be untrue, then everyone else should believe the same.

We will see that their statement, besides constituting a false basis for faith, was even factually untrue. Nicodemus was one of their number (see on v50). Though he may not have openly declared his faith in Jesus, he was yet obviously sympathetic and eventually became a disciple. Likewise, Joseph of Arimathea was a council member who became a disciple (Mark 15:43). The Jewish rulers may not have known these things, but the fact remains that even their argument was factually in error.

Of course, this raised the issue of why many people disagreed with the rulers and believed in Jesus. The rulers responded to that by saying the people were ignorant of the law and were therefore accursed. Hence, all who believed in Him were ignorant and accursed, and all who did not believe were right and should be followed. This approach ignored all the **factual** evidence such as Jesus' miracles, fulfilled prophecies, and the myriads of times He had proved **by the law** that He was right and these rulers were wrong.

The effect of this reasoning, of course, is to make the religious leaders the standard of right and wrong for everything. Yet, they themselves, and all honest people, knew that throughout the history of the Jewish nation the religious leaders had often been wrong (cf. Acts 7). Jesus often warned the people of the danger of just accepting the convictions of the leaders (cf. Matt. chap. 23). In particular, this approach involves men following human guides in religion, a practice that the Bible often rebukes (2 Cor. 10:12,18; 1 Cor. 1:18ff; Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19). This practice also ignores the multitude of warnings about the dangers of false teaching (Matthew 7:15-23; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chap. 2)

Yet, many people today still advocate this approach. Official Roman Catholic doctrine states that, if members just do what the Pope or

the priest say, they will be acceptable to God. Others believe that preachers are trained at special schools, so you can trust them. Good old bro. so-&-so always taught it this way. The elders decided it, so how can we object? Scientists think it happened this way. This is the way it is taught by college professors or textbooks, etc. Even members of Jesus' church sometimes make such fallacious "arguments" to defend their point.

All who reason this way are as wrong today as were these Jewish leaders. Truth is determined by **facts**, evidence, proof, not by **who** accepts or rejects a viewpoint. Yet, people still continue to determine what they believe, not by investigating facts, but by considering **who** is lined up on the various sides of the issue. This is especially offensive when it comes from the mouths of those who want other people to take **their** word for it!

7:50,51 - Nicodemus responds to Jesus' critics

Now we are told that Nicodemus was among the number of this council (very likely this was the Sanhedrin council). He had earlier had a private meeting with Jesus in which he had stated faith in Him (see notes on John 3:1ff). The statements here made by the other leaders constituted a direct challenge to such as him. They had just said that no rulers or Pharisees believed in Jesus. Yet, Nicodemus did believe in Him. As noted already, Joseph was or soon would be a believer. Probably others also believed or at least suspected Jesus' claims were true. But they were very careful how they spoke out, because the rulers opposed all who openly stated their faith (cf. 7:13; 12:42,43).

Nicodemus, however, did make an attempt to reason with these men by asking whether it was right, according to the law, to condemn a man before he even had a chance to speak for himself and defend his beliefs. The answer, of course, was that the law required that a man be given a chance to speak on his own behalf. And these rulers knew such to be the case; or being rulers, they ought to have known. By condemning Jesus without a proper trial, they demonstrated that they, not Jesus, were the ones disobeying and disrespecting Divine law. Rather than maintaining proper objectivity till the evidence had been considered, they proved themselves unfit to rule. See Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16,17; 17:4-6; 19:15ff.

Note that Nicodemus here advocated the proper approach. Not just in courts of law, but also in matters of personal faith, issues must be decided on the basis of evidence and facts. That means that we must be willing to hear both sides and must give an honest consideration to the evidence. It is not fair to just reject a man's view without ever considering the evidence for it. Yet how often today are people, even in the Lord's church, guilty of doing this very thing! Note again Jesus' challenge in 7:24.

7:52,53 - The rulers oppose Nicodemus

The rulers responded to this challenge by asking if Nicodemus was from Galilee. They claimed that no prophet had ever arisen from Galilee. Here again is another example, a classic example, of refusing to judge righteous judgment (7:24). This was wrong in hosts of ways:

(1) Prophets had arisen from Galilee. Jonah was from Gath-hepher, a town in lower Galilee not far from Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25; cf. Joshua 19:13). Elijah was from the inhabitants of Gilead, which was east of the Jordan from Galilee (1 Kings 17:1). Nahum and Malachi may also have been from Galilee (Nahum 1:1). So once again these rulers and supposed experts in the law demonstrated that their conclusions did not even have the facts straight!

(2) Even if no prophet had ever arisen from Galilee, would that prove none ever could? What kind of evidence is this to say God could never do such a thing, even if He never had? The “argument” amounts to regional bigotry. It is like saying no black man can ever be a faithful preacher. What does the region of a man’s origin prove about whether or not God can use him as a teacher or prophet? See notes on vv 27,41,42.

(3) The fact is that Jesus Himself was born, not in Galilee, but in Bethlehem (see on vv 41,42 where the issue was already dealt with). So, the whole discussion is irrelevant and is based on misconception and ignorance. Note that it is the rulers who are ignorant, though they had accused the multitudes of being ignorant! And again, simple research would have shown them the truth, but they were too bigoted to search for truth.

(4) The argument ignores the proof repeatedly presented and well known to all these people that Jesus had done miracles and had fulfilled prophecy. The rulers ignored facts of major relevance and based their case on what amounts to regional bigotry!

(5) Finally, their response does not answer Nicodemus’ point but rather ignores it. He had pointed out that they were refusing to let Jesus present His own evidence and were reaching a conclusion without considering what facts He might be able to produce. So how did they respond? They proceeded to do exactly what he had accused them of! They refused to consider anything Jesus had to say and proceeded to reach a conclusion based on ignorance and prejudice. Had they called Jesus and asked a few simple questions (such as where He was born), they could have eliminated their whole objection.

The fact is, of course, these men did not want to be convinced to believe in Jesus. They had their minds made up to oppose Him, not because of evidence, but because of envy. Jesus was a threat to their popularity in the eyes of the people, and the facts of the case did not matter. We must beware lest we allow our own personal preferences to lead us to ignore evidence and judge people and truth unfairly.

Everyone then went to his own house, perhaps not just in the sense of the end of the day, but also in the sense of the end of the feast. These events had occurred on the last day of the feast (v37). The officers had failed to arrest Jesus, so everyone would disperse to his own city across the nation. Their opportunity to capture Jesus had ended.

John 8

Chap. 8 - Jesus as the Source of Light and Truth

8:1-11 - The Woman Taken in Adultery

This section of John is missing from some of the oldest Bible manuscripts. For that reason, some modern Bibles note that some students doubt that it belongs in the book. However, there is little doubt that the event is historically accurate – i.e., it really did happen. The only question is whether or not John included it in his account or whether someone else added it later. In any case, the teaching of the passage is in complete harmony with Jesus' teaching and with other Scripture. We will treat it as truth. For a longer discussion of the specific evidence regarding the passage, see King's comments.

8:1,2 - Jesus teaches in the temple

The people had gone home (7:53), but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem (see *map*). This is where He often went in the evenings and then returned in the day. It was here He went to pray on the night before His crucifixion.

Early the next morning He returned to the temple and taught the people. This was also customary for Him. It was an obvious purpose for the temple and an obvious place to do teaching, since many people came there for religious purposes. It seems that the feast had already ended, so many people who had come for the feast would have by this time gone home. But many people doubtless remained afterward, and of course many people lived in Jerusalem. It is likely (King says it was traditional) that many other religious teachers would also come to the temple grounds to teach, so people who wanted to hear religious discussions would go there expecting to learn from those who taught. However, it also made an obvious place for Jesus' enemies to find Him, as they did here.

8:3-5 - The Pharisees bring a woman caught in the act of adultery

The scribes and Pharisees, as they often did, found a way to try to test or trap Jesus (v6). They brought a woman to Jesus in the midst of the multitude and said she had been caught in the very act of adultery. They pointed out that, according to the Law of Moses she was to be stoned to death. They asked Him what He said about it.

The teaching of the law is found in Lev. 20:10; Deut 22:22-24. Note that these passages teach both the adulterer and the adulteress should be put to death. If the woman was taken in the very act, then the man should have been caught too. Where was he? If the Jews were really so concerned about following Moses' law as they pretended to be, they would have brought the man too. What they really wanted to do was to trap Jesus. As usual, they are being hypocrites.

8:6 - They seek an occasion to accuse Jesus

This whole event was an attempt to trap Jesus and have something to accuse Him of. The fact that they had ulterior motives should be obvious in several ways. First, they had brought only the woman. But the law required both the adulterer and the adulteress to be stoned. Why had they not brought the man? Second, why bring her to Jesus for judgment? He held no earthly position whatever that gave Him the authority to judge the case. As shown in the notes below, such cases were to be judged by the priests or others in positions of such responsibility. Third, they had already stated what the law said: it said to stone her. If they knew what the law said, why ask Him about it? Why not just do what they acknowledged was taught in the law? The whole case smelled from the beginning of a contrived effort to trap Jesus.

Wherein was the trap? Probably their idea related to their belief that He came to be an earthly king. If so, He should judge such matters as this. If He judged to kill her, they could accuse Him to the Romans of having usurped their authority, since no one could be put to death without their authority (18:31). If he said not to kill her, then they could accuse Him of breaking Moses' law (an accusation they had already raised against Him regarding the Sabbath).

Perhaps too it was a sort of fishing expedition in which they hoped to find something to use against Him, but were not sure what they would find. In any case, they themselves had nothing to lose (they thought) and might get something to use against Him.

Jesus stooped and wrote on the ground with His finger as if He had not heard them. Why do this? He was in no hurry to judge the matter. It surely had the effect of building suspense. At the least, this made it clear that He had no desire to usurp Roman rule and judge such matters. It was the Jews who were forcing the issue and compelling Him to make a decision. Sometimes it is important to make clear to the bystanders who the aggressors are in a situation. Let them see that you do not seek an occasion of argument, but others are forcing the issue.

8:7,8 - Jesus calls on those who are without sin to cast the first stone

As they continued to press Him for an answer, He said that whoever among them was sinless should be the first to throw a stone at

her. Then he stooped and wrote again. This gave them time to consider the matter while not having to face Him as they thought about it.

This turned the tables on them in more than one way. First, it gave them the duty to kill her, if it was to be done. He was not the one who would violate Roman law by killing her, and in fact He would not even be her judge. They would have to judge both her and themselves, and they would have to execute her if it was to be done. In that case, they, not He, would be answerable to the Romans for having usurped their authority.

But even more important, this approach was in harmony with the Law of Moses, which they claimed to be following. The law expressly stated that, in a capital crime, the witnesses must be the first ones to initiate the execution of the guilty (Deut. 17:6,7; cf. Deut. 13:9). This law required the witnesses to demonstrate their conviction that their testimony was true to the point that they would actually begin the execution of the criminal. In reminding them of this principle, Jesus avoided their trap while at the same upholding the law. He appealed to the very source of authority they had cited: the Old Testament law. He then called upon them to demonstrate their commitment to the law and to the guilt of the woman by being the ones to cast the stones.

Further, He appealed to their own consciences. In the presence of all the people, He was forcing them to claim, if they stoned her, that they themselves were innocent of guilt. If they were guilty of sins themselves, however, what right did they have to condemn her to death? They had come to Him with hypocritical intentions, not to uphold the law, but to trap Him. His approach called attention to their wickedness and hypocritical motives, even in the very act of bringing the woman to Jesus.

Note that this does not say, as some claim, that we should never criticize the sins of others, and if we do we are hypocrites claiming we ourselves never sin. See notes on 7:7,24. Jesus' disciples often pointed out people's errors. However, condemning someone to death is not the same as just telling them they have sinned.

8:9-11 - The accusers leave the woman uncondemned

The consciences of these men would not allow them to be the first to throw a stone at her. They left, from the oldest to the last, leaving the woman standing alone with Jesus in the middle of the multitude. Jesus asked whether she had been condemned by any of those men who had accused her. When she confirmed that none had, He said He did not condemn her either, but she should go and sin no more.

Did Jesus here violate the law that said she should be stoned? Did He teach us that we should not condemn sin, and that God is too loving to punish people for sin? Many people use this event to defend such views, but clearly none of these views are acceptable. Jesus never committed any sins at all, not here or elsewhere. He never broke the law

and never told others to do so (see notes on 5:10-18). He often rebuked sin and taught that God will unquestionably punish people for sin (see notes on 7:7,24). What then did He mean?

(1) “Condemn” in v11 is used as in v10 — to pass a death sentence and determine to stone her to death. Her accusers had not been willing to do that (v10), and neither would Jesus condemn her to be stoned (v11). He was not denying her guilt, nor was He unwilling to rebuke her for sin — in fact, He immediately proceeded to affirm and rebuke her guilt. He condemned her of sin, but did not condemn her to **death**. We are not doing that to anyone!

(2) Nevertheless, that He knew she had sinned and needed to repent is clear in that He told her to “sin no more.” Time and again, people cite the case of this woman as evidence that Christians today should not rebuke people for sin. They argue that, if we do, we are claiming we ourselves have committed no sins. Such reasoning shows complete ignorance of this case and of the Bible teaching about rebuking sin. If we should not rebuke people for sin, why did Jesus tell the woman to sin no more? By this statement, He plainly acknowledged that she had sinned and plainly called upon her to repent. This is all we say to anyone, when we tell them to repent. We are telling them they have sinned and need to stop it.

This passage does not teach us we are wrong to rebuke sin, but shows us by the example of Jesus Himself that we ought to tell people to stop sinning! Those who think Jesus did not believe in rebuking people for sin ought to study carefully the context of v44 in this very chapter.

(3) The law required a person to be put to death only if there were two or more witnesses to condemn them. They could not be condemned when there were no witnesses, nor even if there was just one witness (see Deut. 19:15; 17:6; cf. John 8:16; Matt. 18:15-17; etc.). In this case the witnesses had left, having refused to fulfill their duty under the law to be the first to cast stones at her. This left Jesus with no choice, even under the law. He could not condemn her to death, since there were no witnesses. He could rebuke her for sin, which He did. But had He condemned her to death, He Himself would have stood in violation of the law!

(4) Jesus was not the one to judge this matter in any case. He had no authority under Roman law to condemn anyone to death. And under the Law of Moses, questions about judgment were to be taken to the priests or other people in places of authority (see Deut. 19:15ff). Jesus was in no such position (though the people thought He came for that purpose). He had not come to be judge, but to be a teacher and a savior (see John 3:17; 8:15; 12:47; Luke 12:14; 19:10). He will some day return to be judge, but that was not the purpose of His first coming. He had no authority to serve as an earthly judge in this case.

It is also true that Jesus had power on earth to directly forgive sins. He had exercised this power several times. It is possible that He did so in this case. However, personally, I doubt that is the point here. The point is that the witnesses did not condemn her to death, so neither did Jesus. As a prophet and teacher, however, he could rebuke her and urge her to turn from sin.

8:12-59 - Jesus' Claim to Be Light and Truth

8:12 - Jesus claimed to be the light of the world

Continuing to teach the people, Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, so that people who follow Him are not in darkness but have the light of life. Jesus is often referred to as the "light" (John 1:4; 12:35,36,46; 9:5).

Light illuminates, giving understanding and making things clear (Eph. 5:13; John 3:19-21; Psa. 119:105). As such, it often symbolizes righteousness and truth. Darkness is the opposite. It often symbolizes ignorance, confusion, and evil.

Jesus is the source of true revelation from God (John 1:14,18; Heb. 1:1,2). To learn from Him is to truly understand God's will and purpose for our lives. He shows us how to please God and have eternal life. Hence, we walk in light, not darkness, and have hope of eternal life (1 John 1:5-7).

Jesus' statements were made in the temple court area (v20). Some commentators point out that, in this area, lights were set up for the feast of tabernacles. These would have been extinguished now that the feast was over. Yet, the light from the celebration would be fresh on the people's mind, giving Jesus a good opportunity to illustrate that He could provide spiritual light.

Note that Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, not just of any one portion of people. This would conflict with Jewish expectations. They thought the Messiah would give light to the Jewish nation, but would lead them to victory over their enemies in the world. Jesus' claim to be the light of the world foreshadowed the great truth that all people of all nations can benefit from the gospel.

8:13,14 - Discussion regarding Jesus' testimony

Jesus' statement gave occasion for a running debate with the Jewish leaders. They had already determined that they wanted to kill Jesus (7:25,45-52). They had tried repeatedly to trap Him in His teaching. From this point on, the confrontation leads to ongoing conflict.

The Pharisees took up the debate by denying that Jesus could prove such claims as He had just made. They said that He was just making the claim and had no evidence, except just the fact that He Himself claimed it. No other proof could substantiate His claim. They are appealing to the principle that more than one witness is needed to

confirm a truth (see on v18). In particular, one person alone could not stand justified on the basis of his own claims. By himself, he would obviously be a biased witness.

But in this case, such argumentation was nonsense on the surface. Jesus had already given them His witnesses in 5:30-47. As He had repeatedly stated, the reason they were unconvinced was, not that the evidence did not exist, but that they were simply not willing to accept God's will and do it.

Here Jesus responded by saying that, even if He was the only witness, He knew more about His origin than they did. He knew He had come from heaven and would return there. But they had never been in heaven, so how could they give evidence either way about His origin. He may have been just one witness, but He was one witness against none. They had no proof at all. This argument, of course, was adequately convincing for Jesus Himself. He knew He was right. But it would not of itself convince others, which is why He proceeded to give other evidence.

8:15 - Judging by fleshly standards

He said the Jews were judging Him by fleshly standards. Such judging would not always be a wrong way to judge. These men had roles in civil government (many of them) and made judgments regarding physical guilt based on physical evidence (such as whether or not a man committed a robbery). These were historical facts that could be determined by considering the physical evidence. That is not necessarily bad, and is even needed in some cases.

But here the issue was where Jesus came from, what His origin was, and therefore what authority He had. This could not be weighed simply by physical means. If His claim was true, He had been in heaven before He came. That could not be examined by physical means but only by spiritual means. He had been in heaven and knew His origin. They had not been there and so could not use their methods to judge the matter like He could (as in v14).

He said that He judged no one. This could mean that He did not make fleshly judgments like they were making. They had a role in making judgments regarding the guilt of criminals, etc., and in determining the punishment they should receive. But that was not His purpose here. He came to save, not to judge. They had tried to make Him a judge to pass sentence on the woman taken in adultery (8:1-11). He had refused, partly because that was not His role here.

This did not mean He would keep quiet about sin and not rebuke it. He did that many times (see notes on 7:7,24). He meant He was not here to pass sentences and state eternal destinies (see on 8:11). He would come later and do that, but not this time.

Nevertheless, there was a sense in which He could make judgments in determining whether or not a teaching was truly from God, etc. This leads to the next verse.

8:16-18 - Jesus claims the testimony of witnesses

Although Jesus had not come to judge in the sense of determining final destinies, however, in a sense He could make judgments and those judgments would be true. For one thing, He could provide and examine evidence regarding the truth of spiritual claims. He could do that because the Father gave Him power to do so. The Father who sent Him was yet with Him (spiritually, not physically).

He could also use the principle of witnesses to determine the truth of historical claims. This was a law they knew and understood. In fact, they had alluded to it in v13. The principle was that, in determining the facts of a historical case, and hence in determining the guilt or innocence of one who was claimed to be guilty, two or more witnesses were needed to convict a man. See Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28. They could not judge His origin, since it was spiritual and they had not been there to observe it; yet He could judge historical matters to determine the truth of an event (though He would not pass sentence, etc.).

In this case, He had more than one witness and had in fact already presented more than one witness for His claims. He had both His own testimony and that of His Father. That makes two witnesses.

How had the Father testified for Jesus? See once again the notes on John 5:30-47. The Father had testified to Jesus through the Old Testament prophecies and through the miracles Jesus did. He also directly spoke from heaven to claim Jesus as His Son and to affirm His confidence in Him at Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Other evidence could be given, but the point is that Jesus had already cited this evidence to these people in chap. 5. He did have other witnesses besides Himself, yet they simply refused to accept the evidence.

Note that some people today claim that Jesus and the Father are just different terms to refer to the same person or individual. They claim there is only one individual in the Godhead, and this is Jesus. Hence, "Jesus only." However, if that were true, Jesus would not have two witnesses but only one. Contrary to His claim, He would be "alone." But He said that He and His Father made **two** witnesses. He was **not** alone. Hence, there is more than one person in the Godhead.

For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our notes on John 1:1-3 and our articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

8:19,20 - Jesus accuses the Jews of not knowing the Father

Since Jesus claimed the Father as His witness, the Jews naturally asked Him where His Father was. They could not see Him, nor did they know how to contact him, so how could He testify for Jesus? Jesus said they did not know Him or His Father, but if they knew Him, they would know His Father.

This no doubt seemed a riddle to them. How could the Father serve as a witness for Jesus if they did not know Him (see v27)? However, He had already explained in 5:37-47 how the Father bore witness to Him: by the miracles He empowered Jesus to do and by the Scriptures He inspired and which Jesus fulfilled. Yet, they did not recognize what this meant about Jesus. The reason was their attitude.

It was not that they knew nothing about God. You can know about somebody without knowing the person. They knew about Jesus' Father, but did not really know Him in the sense of personally being acquainted with Him as His true servants should be. Their attitude kept them from having a good relationship with Jesus and with His Father. If they had the right attitude, they would have served God properly. This would, in turn, have led them to recognize Jesus when He came. Likewise, a proper relationship with Jesus will lead one to a proper relationship with the father.

Probably, the Jews did not understand what He meant but assumed He was speaking physically, that they just did not know His earthly father. But in fact, His statement was a major criticism of these men who considered themselves so religious and even religious leaders. To say they did not know God would be to state a major insult.

These teachings were given in the treasury of the temple. No one captured Him to kill Him yet because it was still not the proper time. Cf. 7:30,6,44.

8:21,22 - Jesus states His plan to leave them

Jesus then repeated that He was going away, and the people could not go where He was going (cf. 7:33-36). They would seek for Him, but would die in their sins (see notes on v24). The Jews could not understand His statement that they could not go where He was going. They wondered if He intended to kill Himself.

Jesus was soon to die and go back to His Father in heaven. They could not go there in several senses. (1) They were not dead, and no one could go where He was going while still alive in the flesh. (2) He was going to heaven, and no humans can go there till after the judgment, even if they die (Luke 16:19ff). (3) These particular people could not go to heaven at all (in their present condition), because of their sins. They were going to die in sin. Which of these ideas Jesus specifically meant I am not sure. Perhaps more than one is implied.

8:23 - Jesus said He and the Jews were from different places

Jesus explained where He was going in terms of where He had come from. He was going back to where He came from. He had come from the Father in heaven and would return there after His death. But they did not understand either where He had come from or where He would go.

They were of the earth beneath, in contrast to heaven above. Their concerns and interests were physical, material. This was why they misunderstood and opposed so much of His teaching. In particular, this was why they took so many of His statements physically, when He meant them spiritually. Jesus' thoughts emphasize what was spiritual, relating to eternal life, but the people continually emphasized physical things.

8:24 - Without faith in Jesus, men did in their sins

Jesus then stated quite directly one of the great truths of the gospel: All who do not believe in Him will die in their sins. These Jews did not believe in Him, and that is why they were rejecting His teachings. He had said they would die in sin (v21). Here He showed that the reason for this is that they did not believe in Him. Dying in sin was an expression used in the Old Testament to describe people in whose lives sin is so ingrained that they are destined to death apart from God – Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 3:19; 18:24,26.

This was an enormous claim for Him to make. He was teaching that all people had to accept Him for who He claimed to be, or they would be eternally lost. The only way to receive eternal life, then, is by believing in Him. The nature of this claim is such that, if He were an impostor, this claim would be blasphemous. However, if He is who He claimed to be, this truth is essential to our salvation (see notes on 3:15-18; cf. Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; Mark 16:15,16; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16

Consider the consequences of such statements to people who clearly reject Jesus or who even fail to accept Him as the true Son of God, God in the flesh, and Savior of the world. Some say He was an impostor. Others claim to believe He was a great teacher, but they do not accept Him as the Savior of the world, God in the flesh. Such people cannot be saved, so long as they continue in unbelief. They may be Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. Or they may even claim to be Christians. But the fact is that they do not really believe, so they cannot be saved till they do believe. In fact, as shown in other verses, true saving faith must also include obedience; so even those who do not obey are not true believers

Note also the language "I am (He)." "He" is added by the translators. The original says simply "I am." The parallel to Ex. 3:14 has led

many to claim Jesus is here using for Himself the name of God which is equivalent to Jehovah — the “I am.” Such a claim would surely harmonize with other Scripture in John (1:1-3; 20:28) and elsewhere. See notes on 8:58 where it is even more obvious that such a statement is made as a claim to Deity. In any case, it is clear that men must believe Jesus to be all that He claimed to be, and other passages surely show that means He possessed Deity.

8:25-27 - Jesus speaks what He has heard from the Father

The Jews showed they did not believe by asking who Jesus was. This was probably said in derision, almost surely in skepticism. He had just made an amazing claim. Who was He to make such claims that people had to believe in Him or die in sin? Jesus had just warned them of the consequences of not believing in Him, and they immediately responded by showing that they truly did not believe in Him. So long as that continued, they could not be saved.

To answer their question regarding who He was, Jesus did not further elaborate; rather, He called their attention to all the things He had already said. There was enough proof in all He had told them, that they should have known who He was. If they did not know by this time, further statements from Him would not convince them; so He did not try. There comes a time when people have enough evidence, and there is nothing we can explain that will help them. Their problem is an attitude problem, not a lack of facts. When that point comes, as with Jesus in this case, we are no longer required to give further facts.

So, Jesus went on, saying that He had other things to say, but there was no point in saying them. He had spoken, not on His own authority, but things given Him by the One who sent Him. They were true, because of the One from whom they came. But the people did not accept them, and did not even understand that He was talking about the Father.

See His similar statements in 12:49; 15:15. Cf. notes on 5:19,30; 14:10.

8:28-30 - Jesus claims the Father has sent Him and remains with Him

Jesus repeated that what He did and taught was of the Father (see notes on v26). The Father was continuing with Him and had not left Him alone, because He was pleasing the Father. People might oppose His teachings, but Jesus knew He was being true to the Father. He could not change the teaching to please the people, because it was not His to change. It was the Father’s message, and He had to present it as God gave it to Him. This is the true responsibility of every prophet. Of course, being Divine, Jesus completely concurred with the Father’s will and had in fact assented to it before He came to earth.

The point was that, as He continued to give the Father's message, the Father was on His side, standing with Him, supporting Him. It might appear that He was standing alone, and had no witnesses to defend Him, but He knew the Father was there and had testified by miracles, etc. (see on 8:13-18).

Note again the claim that the Father had not left Jesus alone. The One who sent Jesus was "with" Him. This is a clear statement that Jesus and His Father were two separate individuals (see on vv 16-18).

He claimed people would see the evidence that these things were true (i.e., they would have even more convincing evidence to believe them), after He had been lifted up. This clearly refers to His death (see notes on 3:14). In 12:32 He claimed that, when He had been lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself. His death would be followed by His resurrection, and this would cause even many of these skeptics to believe. Many did so beginning on Pentecost and the following weeks (Acts 2,3, etc.).

Note Jesus' claim that He "always" did what pleased the Father. Such a statement amounts to a claim of sinless perfection. Jesus was indeed sinless, as stated elsewhere in Scripture (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). But here we see the claim being made directly from His own mouth. Once again, such a claim would be incredible coming from anyone else.

Jesus set the example for us. Like Him, we must be true to God's will for us. We must speak the message God has given us. We must not change it, but preach it as given. And we must seek the goal of always doing what pleases Him. If we do so, God will be with us to strengthen and bless us. We will not stand alone.

Note again the expression "I am (He)," and compare to notes on 8:24.

The result of Jesus' teaching was that many people believed on Him. This faith was immature, so Jesus immediately challenged them to consider what it would take to truly be His disciples (see next verses).

8:31,32 - Obedience is essential to true discipleship

Jesus informed those Jews, who did believe in Him, that there were necessary conditions to be His disciples indeed. The reaction to His teaching shows that many of them did not have the true devotion to Him that was needed (see vv 33ff). Among other things, this passage shows that people can believe in Jesus yet not really be His disciples. Knowledge and obedience, in addition to faith, are necessary.

A disciple is a follower or learner. The teacher or master gives the instructions, and the disciples learn from the teacher and strive to imitate the principles he lived by and taught (cf. Matt. 10:24,25; Luke 14:26-35). Jesus shows here that true discipleship involves more than just professing or claiming to adhere to a teacher.

A true disciple must abide in the teachings of the Lord. This means the teachings must be obeyed. Faith is essential; but unless the teachings are obeyed, one is not really a disciple. Many passages show that obedience is required in order to please Jesus: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

True freedom requires knowing the truth.

Besides faith and obedience, one must also know the truth in order to be made free. This freedom refers to freedom from sin, as explained in v34. One who sins is a slave of sin. He is held under condemnation of God's wrath and eternal punishment. But the gospel gives true freedom by offering forgiveness so we can avoid the consequences of sin. (Col. 1:13).

Many people today seek the kind of "freedom" where they can do as they please without having to submit to anyone else's rules. Such an idea is totally contradictory to discipleship. By definition, a disciple must submit to the Master's rules (Luke 6:46). The person who seeks freedom from restraint actually makes himself a slave to sin and death (Rom. 6:12-23; cf. 2 Peter 2:18,19). True freedom is freedom from sin and its consequences, which freedom is found only in Christ Jesus (cf. v36).

To receive this freedom, one must know and abide in the truth. God's word is truth (John 17:17). Jesus came to reveal the truth (John 14:6; 1:14-18). In religion, all truth is found in the message He gave to His inspired apostles through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Only this truth can free us from sin. No other source can guide us to this complete, infallible truth (Gal. 1:8,9). For other passages about the importance of truth, see Psalm 19:7-11; 25:4,5; 119:47,48,97,140-143,151; Proverbs 23:23; John 1:14,17; Romans 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15,25,26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 1:22,23.

To benefit from the truth (be made free), we must know the truth. This means we must study it. Many passages show the importance of study and meditation in order to know the truths revealed from God: Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Psalms 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:6. Yet even study and knowledge will not make us true disciples, Jesus said, unless we live by the teachings we learn.

These verses are a key statement of the meaning and requirements of discipleship to Jesus.

8:33,34 - The Jews claim freedom as Abraham's descendants

The Jews reacted by implying they did not need to be made free. This claim may have come, not from the “many” who were beginning to believe (v30), but from the opponents who were also in the audience and had been disputing with Jesus all along.

If Jesus was offering freedom, they thought they did not need it. Proud and conceited in their national heritage, they said they were descendants of Abraham and had never been slaves to anyone. Jews thought the mere fact they were descendants of Abraham guaranteed them a special status with God and man.

Their statement was untrue on the surface. At the very time they spoke, they were slaves to Rome. It was well known in their history that they had been in bondage in Egypt and later in Babylon. And the reason for this physical bondage was because of the greater bondage to which Jesus here referred. They had gone into captivity as punishment for sin.

Their statement was inaccurate; but more important, it completely missed the point of what Jesus meant. He was again speaking spiritually, while they were thinking physically. He was referring to bondage to sin. Here He spoke directly about what their real problem was. He had used illustrations and implications, but they continued to miss the point. Finally, He came out with a direct accusation of sin. This, of course, provoked further disputation from the hearers.

Spiritually, anyone who commits sin is in bondage to it (see notes on v32; cf. Rom. 6:12-23; 2 Peter 2:19; 2 Tim. 2:25,26). These people, like all of us, had committed sin. Worse yet, in their case, they were refusing to come to Jesus to be forgiven. So, they were slaves and would remain such till they were willing to submit to Him. The same is true of all today who commit sin and do not repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. So long as a person is convinced He has no problem, He will seek no solution.

8:35,36 - A slave can be freed by the Son

Jesus then extended the illustration of slavery. They were slaves because of sin, despite their claim to the contrary. One, who is truly a son in a family, is in the family forever. His ancestral lineage cannot be changed. This seemed to be their concept of their favor with Abraham and therefore with God. They thought they were descendants of Abraham and therefore needed no one to make them free.

But Jesus' response shows that they were really slaves and not children. Their sins had made them slaves to sin. Slaves were in bondage and could be transferred from own household to another, if the master chose. In particular, these Jews could, despite their physical descent from Abraham, be transferred from the household of God to

the household of Satan. In fact, Jesus would soon accuse them of having already become members of Satan's family, because they were acting according to Satan's will instead of God's (cf. Rom. 6:12-23). Once again, Jesus' illustration referred to spiritual bondage and spiritual families, but the people missed the point because they thought only of material bondage and earthly families.

However, being a free man (v32) is different from being a slave. Slaves can transfer ownership, but a free man is no longer a slave. Only a member of the household – a son in this case - can grant such freedom. As the Son in the Father's house, Jesus could purchase them from their slavery to sin and set them free (as described in v32). They could not achieve this for themselves, nor could anyone outside the family (Deity) grant it.

Note that, if one becomes a free man, this does not guarantee he will remain free. He can so conduct himself as to once again become enslaved. The same is true spiritually. The fact Jesus offered freedom to them and to us, does not of itself guarantee we will remain free. We remain free so long as we continue in the truth and in abiding in Jesus' word - vv 31,32.

Hence, despite their claims, the Jews did need to become Jesus' disciples so they could be made free. In fact, as the only Son who always has and always will abide in the Father's spiritual house, only the Son could make them free.

8:37,38 - Jesus further distinguishes spiritual families from earthly families

Jesus took His point further by demonstrating that their nature did not partake of that of true children of Abraham. He acknowledged that they were Abraham's descendants in the flesh, but not in spirit. The immediate proof that they were not Abraham's spiritual descendants was that they sought to kill Jesus because they had rejected His word. Such was sinful and demonstrated their bondage to sin (v34). This was the bondage Jesus had warned them about and for which He had offered the solution.

One's spiritual family membership is demonstrated by the Father one obeys (Matt. 12:46-50). Jesus was obeying God the heavenly Father and was speaking His word. This demonstrated His true Sonship to His Father in heaven. The Jews were also following what they had learned from their father. But they were rejecting Jesus, so they did not have the same Father He had. He would later identify their spiritual father (v44).

The Jews had often emphasized the physical, when they should have emphasized the spiritual. Here they were confusing physical family with spiritual family. They thought physical lineage from Abraham made them pleasing to God. Jesus said that physical descent does not guarantee membership in God's family. Sin made them the equivalent

of slaves and as such they could be transferred into another family — that of Satan.

8:39,40 - Jesus denies the Jews' claim to Abraham as their father

Jesus had accused the Jews of having a different father from his father. This led the Jews to repeat their claim that Abraham was their father. They continued to think physically while Jesus spoke spiritually.

Jesus again disputed their claim to be Abraham's descendants by calling attention to their works or conduct. He had already acknowledged that they were Abraham's physical descendants. But if they were true children of Abraham (spiritually), they would act like Abraham. Instead, they were trying to kill one who told them the truth from God. Abraham would never do such a thing. Therefore, they could not really be Abraham's descendants, again meaning spiritually.

8:41,42 - The Jews then claim God as their father

Jesus continued to emphasize that conduct indicates whom one has for a spiritual father. In particular, He said that the deeds of the Jews proved who their father was.

The Jews then caught on that He was not talking about physical descent, so they claimed their Father was God. They knew that, if they were following some other spiritual father (such as an idol), they would be born of spiritual fornication— they would be illegitimate. They were supposed to be children of God. If they had another father, they would be illegitimate.

But their claim did not help their case, because Jesus' argument was based on their works. If they were true children of God, they would have recognized Jesus as having come from God and would have loved and served Him. He had given them abundant proof that He was from God, yet they still rejected Him. This proved they were not obeying God, and therefore God was not their spiritual Father. Their deeds belied their claims.

8:43,44 - Jesus identifies Satan as the father of the Jews

Again, as He had done repeatedly, Jesus explained that the problem that kept them from understanding and accepting His message lay within them. It was not any inadequacy in His message. It was because they were not really listening. They were instead following the desires of their spiritual father. The same reason explains why many people today do not respond to the gospel message of Jesus. It is not because there is any inadequacy in the message, nor necessarily because we have failed to present it clearly. The problem is in the hearts of the listeners.

He had said that God was not their father. Here He stated who their father was: the Devil. They were doing what the devil wanted

them to do, so he was their father. The desire to do things other than what God says is what keeps many people from obeying God, and in many cases it keeps them from even understanding the will of God.

Jesus then described the Devil whom they were serving. He is a murderer (i.e., an instigator of murder) and has been from the beginning. Cain, the son of the first man and woman, murdered his own brother. Clearly, Jesus is saying that Satan tempted Cain to that sin. And Satan is the father of lies for there is no truth in him. The Devil lied to Eve in the garden, and from then on has used lies and deceit to lead people to reject God's will. The result of His original lie was that death came into the world, and all men die ultimately because of him.

In particular, Jesus is here explaining why they believed the lie that Jesus was a sinner and why they wanted to kill Him. He was speaking the truth, but they were listening to the Devil instead. The Devil, who was a liar and murderer, was deceiving them to accept a lie about Jesus and to want to murder Him.

Note how plainly Jesus here rebuked the sins of these Jews. To claim on the basis of John 8:1-11 that Jesus did not believe in rebuking people for their sin is to contradict the whole context. Throughout these chapters, Jesus thoroughly rebuked people for sin, very plainly and publicly.

8:45-47 - The Jews did not believe, because they were not of God

The Devil was the source of lies, and the people were following his lies. It follows that they would reject what Jesus was saying, because it was the truth. They preferred the Devil's lies. When Jesus told the truth, they rejected it. This is a perfect example of the teaching of John 3:19-21.

However, He further challenged them, if they had determined He was worthy of death, on what grounds would they convict Him? What sin could they convict Him of? They needed evidence of guilt if they were to kill Him, and they had none. They could not convict Him of any sin whatever, let alone anything worthy of death. Yet they sought to kill Him.

Note the boldness of Jesus' claim here. He openly challenged the worst of His enemies to demonstrate proof that He had committed sin. It is amazing that anyone would make such a claim. None besides Him would attempt it. But more amazing still is the fact that the people had no response. Jesus would not have made the claim had He been a sinner like others, for He would have known they could convict Him of sin. But He made the claim; and sure enough, the people could not convict Him! See Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

On the other hand, He argued that if they could not convict Him of sin, then they should consider the evidence for His claims. He had giv-

en much evidence in miracles, etc. If they could not prove Him to be in error, then they should accept His message as true and believe it.

But the bottom line, as He had so often stated, was that they were rejecting His words because they were not of God. If they were really determined to please God and really concerned about God's will, they would have recognized the truth of His claims and would have accepted Him. The reason they did not do so was simply that they were not of God.

8:48-50 - The Jews accuse Jesus of having a demon

The Jews had reached the point that they had no sensible answers to the factual evidence Jesus had presented. He had called on them, if they could, to convict Him of sin. They responded by saying He was a Samaritan and had a demon. This constituted nothing but unfounded name calling. Calling a Jew a Samaritan would be considered a great insult (see on 4:9). They had on other occasions accused Him of having a demon (cf. 7:20. 8:52; 10:20; Matthew 9:34; 12:24ff; Mark 3:22ff). But they made no effort whatever to answer His evidence or to prove their claims.

Similar things often happen today. When we show people the evidence they are wrong, but they cannot answer the evidence, they will often make unfounded personal attacks in an effort to discredit the teachers. They will call names implying wild accusations, but anyone can sling insulting epithets. It is entirely another matter to prove someone is in sin.

Jesus flatly denied their charge. He was speaking, not for any such reasons as they attributed to Him, but to honor His father and seek His Father's glory (cf. 7:18). He then affirmed there would be a judgment, implying that at that judgment He would be vindicated and the people would be proved wrong.

8:51-53 - Jesus claims that those who serve Him will not die

Jesus then made another claim for His teaching: those who keep His word will never see death (cf. 6:50,51). This is referring, of course, to eternal life in contrast to the second death. And note again that eternal life does not come simply by believing; Jesus said we must "keep" His word. Here is another verse that plainly teaches that obedience is necessary in order to avoid eternal death. And it is surely a claim that Jesus is Deity. What mere human, even a prophet, would make such a claim?

The Jews, for the zillionth time, take a spiritual statement and think it is physical. They think of physical death and say this statement proved Jesus had a demon. They pointed out that Abraham and the prophets all died. So how could Jesus keep people from death? Such a claim, they reasoned, was a claim to be greater than Abraham and the prophets. So who did Jesus think He was?

Their answer ignored the fact that Jesus was speaking of spiritual life and death, not physical. Abraham and the prophets could receive that even though they died physically.

Nevertheless, they had hit upon the real issue. The major question to be resolved, and the question for which they were giving all the wrong answers, is the question of who Jesus is. Jesus really was claiming to be greater than Abraham and the prophets. To these Jews, such a claim would automatically prove Him to be wrong — how could anyone be greater than Abraham? But again, they overlooked the evidence. What should it be thought impossible that anyone could be greater than Abraham? Consider the evidence. Don't appeal to prejudice.

8:54,55 - Jesus sought to honor His true Father, whom the Jews did not know

Jesus responded that He had not said what He did for the sake of honoring Himself. He came to earth to offer people a way to eternal life. He did not need to do that to be worthy of honor. He did it to save men. If He had honored Himself, it would have done no real good. What mattered was the honor His Father gave Him.

Jesus then identified His Father, whom He had frequently referred to throughout the discussion. He plainly said that His Father is the One they called their God. God is His Father, and He was the One who gave Jesus glory. If God gave Him glory, how could the Jews refuse to do likewise?

But Jesus again explained that the reason they did not accept any of His claims was that they did not have a right relationship with God. Their wrong attitude toward God is what kept them from accepting Him.

Jesus, however, did have a right relationship with God. If He had admitted (as they thought He should) that He did not have a right relationship with God, He would be telling a lie. By charging Him with being a demon and speaking false testimony, they were trying to get Him to agree to a lie. He could not do that.

Then He went to the heart of His rebuke of them. He had said they were doing the will of their father the Devil, who is the father of lies (v44). Here He plainly called these Jews liars like their father! He said, further, that He would be a liar like them, if He denied His relationship with God.

The nature of the conflict made it clear that someone was lying. They had claimed that God was their Father and that Jesus was making claims He could not prove. Jesus had denied their position and said God was His Father and they were in error. Someone was lying about it. Jesus and they could not both be right. Since Jesus affirmed He was right, He stated the conclusion that followed — the Jews were the ones who were lying.

Note once again the plain and severe rebuke of error here. How can anyone believe that 8:1-11 or “judge not” passages mean that Jesus objected to plain rebukes of sin? Jesus had said these men were children of the Devil and liars. How much more plain and forceful can rebukes be? How can it be un-Christ-like for us to rebuke sin in light of Jesus’ own example?

And note further that Jesus recognized that two such conflicting and contradictory views cannot both be right. Today people want to claim that folks in all the denominations are acceptable to God, despite the fact their doctrines directly contradict one another. Jesus knew this cannot be so. When people so completely contradict one another, someone has to be in error!

8:56-58 - Jesus claims eternal existence from before the time of Abraham

Though Jesus had not originally made any statements with the intent of comparing Himself to Abraham, yet they had introduced Abraham into the discussion and had implied that Jesus could not possibly be as great as Abraham (v53). Jesus therefore affirmed that Abraham had seen His day and was glad or rejoiced in it.

How did this happen? Probably this refers to the promise in which God had told Abraham that all nations would be blessed in His seed (Gen. 12:3 and parallels). This was fulfilled by Jesus (Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:16). The point is that Abraham honored Jesus. He knew prophetically that one would come who would be a blessing to all nations (though doubtless he did not fully understand it). He rejoiced in the promise and in the knowledge that it would be fulfilled through his ancestors.

The Jews, thinking physically as always, argued that Jesus was less than fifty years old, so He could not possibly have seen Abraham who had been dead for years. Again, they missed the point; but rather than explain it, Jesus used it to press another truth about Himself. The fact was that Jesus was not just fifty years old. He assured them, “Before Abraham was, I am.”

What an amazing statement! First, Jesus affirmed that He had in fact existed before Abraham (contrary to their idea). That would have been amazing enough to claim. But He could have made that claim simply by saying, “Before Abraham was, I **was**.” Instead, He said, “I **am**.” This affirmed a continuing state of existence before Abraham came into existence. Jesus was claiming **eternal** existence (see notes on John 1:1-3).

Indeed, still more, Jesus used for Himself the unique name of Deity used in Ex. 3:13-15 (see also Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10,14; 46:4; 48:12). In some passages where Jesus used a similar expression, it may be less obvious that He was using a name of Deity for Himself. Here there can be no doubt. He was calling Himself Deity. The context

and manner of usage can lead to no other honest conclusion. The response of the Jews in v59 (see below) demonstrates that they understood the significance of His claim. See notes on 8:24.

The Jews had continually tried to belittle Jesus and His claims. He responded by making His claims greater and more obvious. He would not back down and accept the diminished position they sought to give. He would not even accept equality with Abraham, great as Abraham had been. Jesus claimed eternal existence and the position of Deity!

8:59 - The Jew seek to stone Jesus for His claims

The Jews recognized the significance of Jesus' statement. He was claiming Deity. Of course, His works confirmed His claims, so they should have recognized Him for who He was. But their preconceived ideas would not allow them to accept that He was so great. And since His claims were blasphemous, if they were not true, they determined to stone Him. However, it was still not time for Him to die, so He hid Himself, passed through the midst, and left.

This whole encounter is an amazing statement from Jesus, as plain as any in Scripture, in which He plainly rebuked the people and plainly affirmed His Deity.

John 9

Chap. 9 - Healing of the Blind Man

9:1-3 - Jesus met a man who had been blind from birth

This chapter records another of Jesus' great miracles. It is especially amazing, because it describes great efforts by Jesus' enemies to explain it away. The result is to provide us with even more convincing evidence for the validity of His miracles, which in turn confirms His claims to be the Son of God.

Jesus passed by a man who had been blind from birth. Note the passage expressly said He was blind and had been so all his life. This will be confirmed as the story proceeds (see vv 8,18-23).

The disciples apparently held the view that suffering was the direct consequence of sin committed by the person suffering or by his immediate ancestors. So, they asked whether the man's blindness was the result of his sin or of his parents' sin. Jesus responded that it was neither. Rather, the man was an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate the works of God.

Job's friends also held the theory that all suffering occurs because of sin committed by the one who is suffering. The book of Job extensively discusses and disproves that view. The Bible actually gives several different reasons why people suffer. Some do suffer for their own sins, as when a criminal is punished or a drunkard dies in an accident, etc. Other people suffer because those around them sin, as when a drunken father beats his family or Christians are persecuted for their faith.

But Job 1,2 shows that sometimes people who have not sinned suffer for reasons that are not obvious. It may be no one has sinned yet, but the devil is causing problems for the purpose of tempting people to sin. Finally, Gen. 3 shows that much suffering is simply the common lot of mankind since sin entered the world. When sin came, death (and the suffering that leads to it) came upon all people.

I doubt that Jesus is here saying that God caused this man to be blind simply that Jesus might heal Him and show His power. Such would bring a lifetime of suffering on the man, when there would always be plenty of people to be healed who were suffering for other reasons. It seems more likely that He was denying that anyone's immediate sin had caused the problem, thereby answering their immediate question. Then He explained that one benefit that could come from the suffering is that it gave Jesus the opportunity to heal him.

9:4 - The need to work while we have opportunity

Jesus then explained that this was an opportunity for Him to do the work God sent Him to do. And He had to do it while He had the opportunity, because the time would come when He could not do it. This is illustrated by day and night. In the day one can do certain jobs that cannot be done at night (as farmers working in their fields, etc.). So one must do the work while the opportunity is present.

For Jesus, the opportunity to work would end when He died. That time was drawing closer, as the Jewish leaders became more persistent in opposition. He knew that soon He would no longer be “in the world,” so He had to accomplish His work while still here. Note again that He knew all along He must die.

We also need to learn that we have only limited opportunities to do what God wants us to do. Now is the day. While we are in the world we can be forgiven of sins, grow in God’s service, teach our families and spread the gospel to the lost, worship God, etc. But there will come a time when the opportunities are taken from us. Someday our children will be grown and may be beyond our reach with the gospel. Or friends may die or leave and we can no longer teach them. Or our own lives may end with us unsaved. The night will have come when it is too late to do the work God gave. We must do the work now while we can. Are we doing so?

King notes with interest Jesus’ use of the word “work.” This is interesting, because Jesus was about to heal this man on the Sabbath. Note that He did not deny this activity was “work.” Rather, He Himself called it work. What He denied was that such work was a violation of the Sabbath law.

9:5 - Jesus as the light of the world

Then Jesus reminded them of another illustration He had used, saying He was the light of the world (see notes on 8:12). This referred to Him as the source of truth by which men could “see” how to receive eternal life.

However, Jesus here is about to demonstrate His power to give spiritual light by giving the blind man physical light. By giving sight to the blind man, He could prove that He was from God and would confirm His claims to be true. Hence, just as the blind man came to see physically, so we can see the way to eternal life through Jesus. And the proof that His claims are true lies in His ability to do such miracles as this. (See vv 39-41.)

9:6,7 - The blind man is healed

The manner of this miracle is somewhat unique. Jesus spat on the ground and made clay with which to anoint the man’s eyes. He then told the man to go to the pool of Siloam (meaning “sent”) and wash the clay off. When the man did so, his sight was restored.

Obviously, it was not necessary for Jesus to heal in this manner. He healed in various manners. Sometimes He touched the person who sought to be healed, but other times He was not even in the same town with them. Sometimes He sought a demonstration of faith; in other cases, people could not possibly have had faith or at least it was irrelevant. Sometimes people just touched him and were healed. He used spittle, not just in this case, but also in healing another blind man (Mark 8:23) and a deaf mute (Mark 7:33).

Why then go through this procedure, if the manner of healing was not necessary? Perhaps it served to prove to others that the manner did not matter! Anyone can see that spittle and dirt cannot heal blind men. Let others try it, and they will see it is irrelevant. Perhaps by doing various different things, all of them impossible by their own nature to heal, He was just making it more obvious that there was no magic or power in any ritualistic format. The power was in *Him*, and He could heal anyway He chose.

Perhaps also the action is symbolic of our spiritual healing. Jesus had said that He would demonstrate that He is the light of the world, meaning spiritually. To be healed spiritually, there is something we must do. We must obey Jesus' command and wash in water (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21). The man washed his eyes because that is what needed to be healed. We wash our bodies because we are completely sinful.

Yet, when we obey and are forgiven, who can say our own power healed us? The spittle, clay, and water had no real power of themselves, but the man still had to obey Jesus to be healed. So washing in water has no real power of itself to remove sin, but it is necessary as a condition to receive Jesus' forgiveness. Whether or not Jesus intentionally set up this parallel, still it is a valid parallel and illustrates clearly that meeting conditions to receive God's grace does not in any way nullify His grace. The blind man was cured by Jesus' grace, but he still had to do something to receive the cure. This same parallel is illustrated by the healing of Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5.

Also, this healing again demonstrates the characteristics of true Bible miracles. The man was unquestionably blind (cf. vv 1,8,18-23). He was unquestionably cured (cf. vv 7,11,15). The method used to heal him could not possibly have any natural explanation. It had to be impossible by natural law. The healing was instantaneous in that it happened at the very instant Jesus implied it would (vv 7,11,15). It was complete and perfect in that the man was definitely able to see (vv 7,11,15). Modern so-called faith healers cannot possibly duplicate such true miracles.

9:8,9 - Neighbors begin the inquiry regarding the miracle

Following the miracle came a very interesting interrogation procedure. People were naturally skeptical that so amazing a healing had

really occurred. The investigation that followed simply strengthens the conviction of the miracle. What modern faith healer is willing to allow his healings to be investigated like this one was; and who could successfully withstand the investigation if it happened? (Cf. *A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*, which investigates the so-called miracles of Kathryn Kuhlman.)

First, the people investigated whether the man who now could see was the same man who had been blind and begging by the road. Note that the man was a local man who was known to the people in the area. People had seen him and knew his condition. Some confirmed that he was the one. Others, perhaps not yet so sure, nevertheless confirmed that he looked like the man. Then the man himself confirmed that he was the one. Later, his own parents confirmed it.

Hence, there was no substitution of a man with sight for the blind man. Such a possible natural explanation will not work. The various possible natural explanations are considered and excluded, leaving us with the only conclusion that it was a miracle as claimed.

9:10-12 - People then ask the man to tell how he had been healed

In response to questions, the man described what had happened and said that a man named Jesus did it. Note at this point he had never seen Jesus, but only knew His name. The man's story exactly confirmed the event as previously described (see vv 6,7). Here we have the exact testimony of the man, which confirms John's original description.

The people then asked where this Jesus was, and the formerly blind man said he did not know.

9:13-16 - The Pharisees begin their investigation

The investigation then was turned over to the Pharisees. We are not told why the people brought the story to the Pharisees. Perhaps some wanted to convince the Pharisees to believe; perhaps others thought the Pharisees could disprove the miracle. In any case, the Pharisees were the alleged experts in the law, and were generally Jesus' enemies. They would no doubt be interested in the case. And if there were any way to disprove it, they would have done so. If they could not disprove it, how then could anyone today disprove it 2000 years later when the witnesses cannot be interrogated?

The Pharisees asked the man how he received sight, and the man confirmed the story again. Note that there was no doubt that the man could see. Even the Pharisees admitted he could see. The issue was not whether he could see. All admitted that. The only question was how it happened and whether this was the same man.

Some Pharisees immediately argued a man of God could not have done this, since the healing, again, was on the Sabbath. But other

people argued properly that the very occurrence of the miracle proved it was from God. Such miracles could not be done except by the power of God and by One who was from God. Hence, division existed.

This repeats issues already discussed through John's account (see notes elsewhere).

The issue of healing on the Sabbath had been discussed in 5:9-18; 7:21-24.

The purpose of Jesus' miracles being a sign to validate His claims and prove He is from God has been discussed repeatedly (see 3:2; 5:36; 7:31; etc.).

The division caused by Jesus, with some people believing and others disbelieving is discussed in 7:43 and elsewhere.

Again the proper approach is to begin with the confirming proof of the miracles and then reason to the conclusions that follow. Do not begin with preconceived ideas and reject the evidence.

9:17 - The healed man confesses Jesus to be a prophet

The Jews then asked the blind man what he thought about Jesus for having healed him. The blind man said Jesus must be a prophet. Many Old Testament prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, etc., had done miracles to confirm they were prophets sent by God. The blind man, having personally witnessed the miracle Jesus did on him, concluded Jesus must likewise be a prophet.

Note the progression of faith in those who are converted (cf. the woman of Samaria in chap. 4). In v11 the blind man called Jesus simply "a man called Jesus." Here he calls him, not just a man, but a prophet. We will see how his faith grows as the story proceeds.

This demonstrates the purpose of miracles: to give evidence as the basis of faith.

9:18-23 - The Jews question the man's parents regarding his healing

In their efforts to disprove the miracle, the Jews then sought to determine if the man had really been born blind. They called his parents and asked them whether he had truly been born blind and how he could now see. Note that the proceedings here take on the form of a judicial hearing. Witnesses are called and questioned by authorities in the law. In this case, however – as was usual when the Jewish leaders dealt with Jesus – the authorities were determined to disprove Jesus, rather than to determine the truth. Yet, they must follow the form of an honest investigation. The results give us a strong confirmation of the miracle by men who sought to disprove it!

The man's parents testified that this man really was their son, and that he was born blind. However, they were unwilling to state any conclusion about how he was healed, because they feared the consequences. The Jews had said that anyone who confessed Jesus as

Christ would be put out of the synagogue. So, the parents simply told the Jews that their son was old enough to speak for himself, so they should ask him how he was healed.

However, note the value of the parents' testimony, in confirming the miracle. The enemies were trying to discredit the miracle, but instead we now have proof that this was the same man and that he had been born blind. There is no possibility that the blind man had been secretly replaced by another man who was not blind. Nor can there be any doubt that the man really had been blind. His own parents testified that this very man had been blind from birth.

And note especially that there was no doubt that the man could now see. Everyone agreed to that. Even the enemies said, "How does he now see?" They made no effort to deny that the man could now see. That was undeniable. They have also now eliminated the possibility of mistake regarding whether the man had been born blind. So, the proceedings at this point have established that the man was born blind and could now see, as a result of something Jesus did. The only remaining question is how it happened and what that meant about Jesus' identity. Hence, the miracle was substantiated by the efforts to disprove it!

What modern faith healer could successfully withstand such investigation? Oral Roberts even admitted that healing blind people was especially hard for him, and this man had been **born** blind!

The parents in this story illustrate many people today who are compromisers and middle-of-the-roaders. The evidence was plain before them. If anyone was convinced by the miracle, it should have been they. But they were afraid to accept the consequences, so they refused to take a stand. Being cast out of the synagogue was a serious consequence. It would have made them outcasts among the Jewish people, including their closest friends and relatives. But that society was predominantly Jewish, which would leave them with severe personal and even financial consequences. Being a disciple in those early days carried heavy consequences for many people.

Many people today do likewise when confronted with the evidence of what God's word requires of them. They see the proof and cannot deny it. Yet they know that major sacrifices will be required, if they embrace the teaching and commit themselves to it. So, instead, they make excuses to postpone a decision or put the responsibility on others.

And note also the strength of the Jewish opposition already at this point. Jesus had made little public effort to claim to be the Christ; He was laying the groundwork by His teaching and miracles. Yet, the Jews had already decreed that those who would declare Him to be the Christ would suffer severe consequences. This also shows the preconceived views with which they approached this investigation. They were

already convinced He was a fraud. Their goal was, not to seek the truth, but to disprove that Jesus was from God. This same attitude is what led them to kill Jesus and then to severely persecute His disciples through the early history of the church.

9:24,25 - The Jews demand that the blind man acknowledge Jesus to be a sinner

The rulers then called back the man who had been blind. He had been healed. The rulers could not deny that. But they refused to accept that this proved Jesus was from God. They affirmed instead that they knew Jesus was a sinner. Presumably, this was based on their earlier criticisms of Him for healing on the Sabbath.

The expression “Give God the glory” is used similarly in Joshua 7:19; 1 Samuel 6:5; Ezra 10:11. It appears to be a form of charge to one who was testifying in a trial, that he was to glorify God by confessing the truth.

This makes clear that these rulers, though they were investigating the healing, they were not doing so with an open mind. Their minds were made up that Jesus was a sinner. They were just looking for ways to justify their pre-existing conclusion despite the evidence. If they could break down the blind man’s testimony, they would feel justified in their views and could discredit Jesus before the people.

The blind man refused to admit Jesus was a sinner, but he also knew little of Jesus’ life. So, he could not, from personal knowledge of Jesus’ life, conclude whether Jesus was a good man or a sinner. But instead, he called attention to the evidence that did exist: He had been blind, but now he could see. Here again is the clear testimony of the blind man that he had been blind and had been healed.

This is the right approach! Instead of starting with a preconceived idea about Jesus or about what we want or what we are already convinced to be true, we should start with the evidence and then follow it to the proper conclusion. The Jews started with the conclusion that Jesus was not who He claimed to be, and then disregarded the evidence of His miracles. Honest people began with the evidence and reason from there to the conclusion that follows. If so, it follows (and the blind man will soon come to this conclusion) that Jesus could not have done the miracle at all, if God had not been with Him.

9:26,27 - The Jews again ask how Jesus had healed the man

The Pharisees then tried to cross-examine the blind man’s story again. They asked him again how Jesus opened his eyes and exactly what Jesus did. By this time it was obvious that they did not want to know the truth. They were looking for loose ends to unravel. They were only asking in hopes they could find something in the story to discredit. Like Balaam, they wanted to hear more in hopes the story would

change and they could find something that fit what they wanted to hear.

So, the blind man explained that he had already told them his story, but they would not accept it. They obviously were not going to accept his testimony, unless he said what they were determined to hear. He asked them why they wanted to hear it again. Did they want to be convinced, so they would become Jesus' disciples?

In saying this, he raised, indirectly (and probably somewhat sarcastically), the issue of their motives. If they did not want to be Jesus' disciples, then why keep going over and over the story? The facts were clear. Their only possible motive was to discredit the evidence.

Note that, when people have been given a straightforward, honest answer to a question, but then they repeatedly ask the same question again, it is proper to call into question their motives for asking. If they have been given the proof, but they don't accept it and yet ask for more proof, then what is the point in continuing to repeat what they have already heard? It is proper to question them and throw the responsibility back in their laps to give answer. Challenge them to show what was wrong with the answer or why they don't accept it. But nothing is to be gained by going around and around the same circle.

9:28,29 - The Jews claim to follow Moses, not Jesus

When the blind man pointed out that the Jews had no sensible motive for their continued investigation, they reviled him saying they were disciples of Moses, not of Jesus. They were convinced Moses was from God, but could not tell where Jesus was from.

The issue of where Jesus is from had been raised repeatedly in discussions with Him and about Him. Some claimed He could not even be a prophet, let alone the Christ, because He was born or grew up in the wrong place – see notes on 7:27,41,42,52. But the greater question was where He was from spiritually. Did God send him from heaven, as He had repeatedly claimed? See on 8:14; 19:9; etc.

Interestingly, Jesus had already told them that, if they believed in Moses they also had to believe in Him since Moses testified of Him (5:45-47). There was no conflict between Jesus and Moses. It was not an either/or situation. One who was a true disciple of Moses should also accept Jesus, because Jesus' teaching fulfilled Moses' prophecies.

The Jews said they did not know where Jesus had come from, yet the evidence was clear. They were just denying the evidence. The blind man proceeded to show them so in the following verses.

9:30-33 - The blind man teaches the truth to the supposed legal scholars

The blind man then returned to the evidence, as all honest people should do. The Jews had said they believed in Moses but did not know where Jesus was from. Yet the evidence for Jesus was of the same

nature as the evidence for Moses and even stronger. What proof did these people have that Moses was from God? The major proof was in the miracles Moses did in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness.

The healed man likewise said it was amazing that they did not know where Jesus was from, yet He had done a miracle that even Moses had never done. Jesus had healed the man of blindness he had suffered since birth! This was unknown from the beginning of the world. Jesus could not possibly have done this had his teachings not been from God.

In making this statement, the blind man stated a principle elsewhere confirmed in Scripture: God does not hear sinners, but He will hear one who does God's will and worships Him. Though this statement is here made by an uninspired man, yet it is confirmed in James 5:16; 1 John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8,29; Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 1:15-17; 59:1,2, etc.

This does not mean God is not aware of the prayers of any other people (cf. Acts 10:31). But people in sin do not have the promise and assurance God will hear, as do those who are faithful. A sincere lost person who wants to serve God may, in response to prayer, receive an opportunity to learn the truth. But he is never told to pray for forgiveness (as some people teach), and he has no assurance God will give him anything in answer to his prayer, except an opportunity to know the truth.

In this context, calling on God refers to a prophet who asks God to do a miracle, and God hearing refers to God doing the miracle as in 1 Kings 18:25-37. How can the healed man's statement be harmonized with the fact that people who were not faithful to God had, at times, done miracles, such as Balaam, Cornelius' household, etc.? The answer is in the purpose of miracles. The miracles confirmed the **word** — the message being preached, including the claims of the teachers (Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39). They did not confirm that everything the man **did** in his personal life was right, but only that his religious **teachings and claims** were valid. But Jesus' teachings and claims were that He was the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Christ, Lord of all, none could prove Him guilty of sin, etc. These other people, who did miracles despite not being faithful to God, never made such claims. Those miracles simply proved that the message they spoke was true.

Note how the blind man's conviction and courage grew stronger as he saw that the Jews could not overthrow the evidence. He had stated Jesus was a prophet (v17). Here he stated plainly that Jesus was from God (vv 30-33). He even had the courage to rebuke these Jewish legal experts for not seeing this.

9:34 - The rulers reject the man who had been healed

The rulers responded with the bigotry typical of prejudiced people determined at all costs to defend their position regardless of the facts. They had earlier claimed that, since none of them believed in Jesus, it followed that no one else should believe in Him either (7:45-49). Others who disagreed were ignorant and accursed.

They here repeated that approach with the blind man. They had been totally unable to refute his evidence or find any flaw any it. Yet, they concluded that he was born in sin and could not possibly teach them anything, so they cast him out of the meeting. And all this despite the evidence! The evidence is irrelevant; just don't disagree with us because we are always right! Such arrogance!

The claim that the man was born in sin may refer back to the concept discussed in 9:2,3. The idea was that the man was born blind, therefore he must have committed some horrible sin. While the reasoning may not be the same, we have people today, such as those who hold the Calvinist and Catholic concept of original sin, who claim that all babies are born guilty of sin. But who is it that here believes and defends the view of a baby born in sin? It is not Jesus and not faithful teachers, but those who are manifestly evil and in error. It became a way to avoid admitting they were wrong and others were right, despite the evidence.

For further discussion of original sin and inherited depravity, see our article on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

9:35-38 - Jesus again speaks to the man who had been healed

The blind man, who had been healed, had been cast out of the gathering of the Pharisees. When Jesus heard this, he found Him and asked if he believed in the Son of God. The man had never seen Jesus, since he could not see till after Jesus had sent him to the pool to wash. His conclusions about Jesus, as stated to the Pharisees, showed that He knew Jesus was a prophet sent from God. But he did not yet realize the fullness of Jesus' nature. So, Jesus found the man with the intent of teaching him further. (The account implies that, though he had not seen Jesus, the blind man recognized Him when he spoke to Him again, perhaps by His voice, etc.)

When Jesus asked if the man believed in the Son of God, the man asked who He was so he could believe in Him. Jesus' question was obviously asked to get this response. Jesus then stated that He Himself was the One. The man confessed Jesus, saying that he believed and he then worshipped Jesus. Note the power of the man's conviction. As a result of witnessing this great miracle, the man was ready to accept as Divine whomever was indicated by the One who healed him. He was

certain the One who had healed him was a prophet from God, so the healed man could be sure that He would speak the truth.

This is a further major claim of Jesus recorded by John. In this case, Jesus did the miracle that confirmed His claim before He even made the claim. The statement of who He is followed the giving of the evidence that the claim was true. The claim was that He is the Son of God. Here then is an instance in which Jesus directly stated this claim.

And note that the man received the ability to see physically in order that he might be able to see spiritually something even more important. He could now see that Jesus was the Son of God. See vv 39-41 to learn more about this.

The healed man confesses and worships Jesus.

The formerly blind man then confessed his acceptance of Jesus' claim. This is a clear example of confession of Jesus. Other such examples and related statements are found in Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15. The Jews had said that such confession of Jesus would lead to people being cast out of the synagogue (John 9:22), and this is why some people later would not confess Him (cf. John 12:42,43). Hence, confessing Jesus was an outward act that separated Jesus' disciples from those who were not disciples. Confessing Jesus is likewise necessary today, before one is baptized, in order to become His disciple.

Surely, no one would deny that this man did confess Christ, but notice that he did so simply by saying, "Lord, I believe." Some today become technical in demanding some specific form for confessing Christ. They may require one to speak a complete statement, such as "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Or, "I confess Jesus is Lord and Christ." I have even known of people who mistakenly concluded that their baptism was not valid, because in their confession they simply said, "I do," when asked if they believed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. But this and other Bible examples of confession demonstrate that there is no required specific form of confession. Confessing Christ may take different forms. Here, one confessed simply by saying, "Lord, I believe." Clearly, he meant that He believed Jesus to be the Son of God, but he never used the phrase "Son of God" nor the word "Christ." The essence of confession is a statement with the mouth that clearly affirms acceptance that Jesus is all who He claims to be.

The blind man went further and worshipped Jesus. The word "worship" can, in some contexts, be used for bowing as honor in a secular sense to a civil ruler. But when offered as an act of religious honor, it was not to be offered to anyone but to God. Peter refused to allow Cornelius to bow in religious honor to him (Acts 10:25,26). Angels likewise refused to accept worship (Rev. 19:10; 22:8,9). We are forbidden to worship any created thing (Rom. 1:25,26). Jesus refused to worship

the devil, and said worship should be given only to God (Matt. 4:10; Cf. Ex. 20:3-6; 34:14; Rev. 9:20; etc.).

Yet, here Jesus allowed the blind man to worship Him, and the significance is clearly religious honor. He worshiped Jesus as the “Son of God,” not as some mere earthly ruler. Many similar examples exist in which Jesus accepted worship. Before His resurrection, Jesus accepted worship in Matt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; Mark 5:6, as well as here in John 9:38. After His resurrection, He accepted worship in Matt. 28:9,17; Luke 24:52; and John 20:28,29. In fact, Heb. 1:6 says angels are commanded to worship Him. Jesus’ acceptance of worship, in light of His teaching, means that He was claiming Deity. The only alternative is that He was a total hypocrite, and not even a good man. Yet, these alternatives are untenable in this context, because His miracle confirms His claims. He did a miracle to prove He was teaching truth, then He claimed to be the Son of God, then He allowed a man to worship Him as the Son of God. Therefore, He is the Son of God, God in the flesh, possessing Deity even as does the Father and the Holy Spirit. He receives honor just as the Father does – 5:23. Once again, John is demonstrating the magnitude of who Jesus really is.

And then note the progression in the healed man’s understanding of who Jesus is. As with the Samaritan woman in John 4, his faith grew as the story progressed. First, he stated Jesus was “a man” (v11), then “a prophet” (v17), sent “from God” (v33). Finally, he recognized Jesus as “the Son of God” (vv 35-38).

9:39-41 - Physical blindness compared to spiritual blindness

Jesus had not come into the world to condemn man, as He had said earlier in 3:17 (though when He comes again He will condemn men for sin). However, judgment will result in the sense that people who do not accept His teaching will stand condemned because they remain in their sins. Men must believe in Him and obey His teachings to be forgiven (John 8:32). If they do not believe, they will die in their sins (John 8:24). So, acceptance of Him becomes the criterion that separates people who are pleasing to God from those who are not. This results in judgment on those who do not accept Him.

He expressed this in terms of seeing versus not seeing. Those who accept Him see the light spiritually. He had introduced His healing of the blind man by saying that He is the light of the world (v5), the source of true knowledge, righteousness, and spiritual enlightenment. Even physically blind people can have this enlightenment. He proved He could give this spiritual light by giving physical sight to the blind man.

Hence, those who do not see (physically) can through Him see (spiritually). But people who reject Him, though they have physical eyesight, will yet not see (spiritually). (Or perhaps the point is that

people who **claim** to see, like the Pharisees, will actually remain spiritually blind. Only when we admit that we are in spiritual darkness will we begin to search for the light and accept it — see below.)

The Pharisees (who had rejected the blind man) responded by asking if He was including them among the blind. Jesus responded with one of His typical spiritual statements. He said that, if they were blind, they could be freed from their sins. Since they claimed to not be blind, their sins remained.

The point is that, if they would admit that they had been wrong and spiritually blind — i.e., if they would repent of their sins and of their rejection of Him — then they could be forgiven. But as long as they continued to claim that they had sight, they would remain in sin. I.e., as long as they continued to claim that they had the truth and other people, like the blind man, were in error, they would refuse to recognize their own sins. So, they would continue in the sins.

The only way to remove sin is to admit that you have been in darkness and error. Then there is hope that you will search for the light and be saved. These Pharisees would not admit they were in darkness, so they remained in darkness.

John 10

Chap. 10 - Jesus as the Good Shepherd

10:1-21 - Teaching about the Good Shepherd

Jesus here gives a beautiful illustration of His relationship with His disciples. Like all Bible illustrations, it must be used to teach only what God intended it to teach. No illustration is parallel in every regard to that which is it used to illustrate. We must not force the example to teach what Jesus did not intend, but must seek to learn the lessons the Lord intended to convey.

10:1,2 - The true Shepherd contrasted to thieves

Jesus had been involved in an ongoing debate or conflict with the Jewish leaders about who He was. His miracles should have convinced them that His claims were true. But He had repeatedly stated that they were blind to the truth, because they did not really want to follow God (9:40:41). They pursued other motives.

In this section, John records a lengthy statement by Jesus comparing Himself to a Good Shepherd and the Jewish leaders to thieves or wolves who came to steal His sheep. Sheep were common livestock in Bible times and the occupation of shepherd was well known to all the hearers. In fact, the patriarchs of the Israelite ancestry, Abraham and his descendants, had been shepherds. Jesus and other Bible writers had often used the sheep/shepherd illustration to teach various truths about the relationship between God and His people. The best known of these is Psalms 23. But other examples are found in Psalms 77:20; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; 53:6; Luke 15:3-7; 12:32; Mark 14:27; John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-30.

The Jewish leaders considered themselves shepherds of the people of Israel, and in fact they should have led the people to serve God according to His will. But they were like the false shepherds of Ezekiel 34, who simply used the sheep for their own selfish purposes, rather than caring and providing for the sheep. Events in the previous chapter introduced this subject, because those who ought to have been “shepherds” in Israel had just cast out one of their sheep, but Jesus took him in. As Johnson says: “These professed shepherds had just cast out from their fold a poor lamb for the crime of refusing to believe that the person who had opened his eyes was a sinner.”

Jesus began His illustration by contrasting the true shepherd to thieves. The true shepherd would enter the sheepfold by the door, but one who would try to climb up and enter some other way must be a thief. Sheepfolds in those days, I am told, consisted of an area enclosed by a wall or fence to keep the sheep from wandering and to keep out predatory animals and thieves. But the fold had a door or opening through which the true shepherd of the sheep could enter and lead the sheep in or out.

The shepherd did not need to use deceit, trickery, or any illegitimate means to get the sheep to follow him or to claim leadership of the sheep. He had a legitimate right to lead the sheep, so he could come in directly through the door, using honest, upright means to call the sheep to follow him. One would resort to dishonest, deceitful methods only because he had no legitimate claim to lead the sheep.

Jesus did not here make application of the illustration. Later, however, He did explain that He is the Good Shepherd (v11). He has a right to lead the sheep, so His efforts to call them to follow Him are legitimate and within His rights. This is contrary to the claims of the Jewish leaders who were attempting to discredit Him, saying that He was a sinner not worthy to be followed but worthy of death (9:24).

Thieves are those who have no right to certain property, but attempt to take it for themselves illegitimately, thereby defrauding the proper owners. So, spiritually, the thieves in this illustration would represent anyone who used unlawful, improper means to gain control of the people of God.

In this context, Jesus surely was including these Jewish leaders as thieves. He had repeatedly claimed that they were not following God. They ought to have acted as shepherds and led the people to accept Jesus, since He was from God. But instead, they refused to believe in Him and threatened to cast out anyone who did confess Him. This surely forfeited any right they might have had to lead the people. Yet, they wanted the people to continue to follow them instead of Jesus. This was illegitimate, according to God's plan, and constituted them spiritual thieves.

The same principles, however, would apply to anyone who disobeys Jesus' true teachings and tries instead to get people to follow some other teaching. Such is illegitimate by God's plans (Matt. 15:1-14). The result would lead people to follow human ideas instead of the will of God. This constitutes all such people thieves.

10:3-5 - The true shepherd enters legitimately

The true shepherd can do several things that pretenders cannot do. The sheep sleep at night oftentimes in the fold (pen). A doorkeeper guards the door of the fold. When the true shepherd comes, the doorkeeper recognizes him and opens the door for him. He can then simply call the sheep, and they follow him because they know his voice. But

they will not follow a stranger because they do not recognize his voice. Again, the shepherd can use legitimate means to get the sheep to follow him, because he has lawful right to lead them.

It may not be clear whom the doorkeeper here represents. It could be John the Baptist and perhaps other prophets, who had prepared the way for Jesus, getting the “sheep” ready to accept Him. When Jesus came, John recognized Him and testified that He was the Son of God (John 1:29-34). Jesus could legitimately accept this testimony, because He was the Christ who had been prophesied. (Other people claim that the doorkeeper represents God, who prepared the way for Jesus and authorized His leadership. This preparation, however, was done largely through the Old Testament prophets.)

The sheep hear the shepherd's voice.

Note that the shepherd does not need to drive the sheep, but leads them. Nor does he need to compel each one to follow; he simply calls.

Johnson describes a typical scene, as shepherds separate their sheep. Many flocks may spend the night together mixed indiscriminately within a fold or city. In the morning, various shepherds stand outside the gate as all the sheep pass out in one large mixed group. Then each shepherd moves away in his chosen direction, calling to the sheep. The sheep hear the call of their own shepherd and follow him out to pasture, thereby separating the mixed group into the separate flocks belonging to the various shepherds.

To illustrate further, in another instance a shepherd exchanged clothing with one who was not the shepherd of the flock. Then both men began to call the sheep. The sheep ignored the one who was not their shepherd, even though he appeared by his clothing to be the shepherd. As Jesus said, they did not know his voice, so they refused to follow. Instead, they immediately followed their true shepherd, even though he was disguised in other clothing. Yet, they followed, because they knew his voice.

Likewise, the call of Jesus separates His true followers from those who do not follow Him. When He began teaching, those who were truly willing to be the true people of God (i.e., those who were willing to do God's will — 7:17), recognized Jesus for who He is and willingly followed Him. They could distinguish Him from false teachers, because they knew His characteristics.

How did they recognize Him? By His miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and the truthfulness of His teaching compared to the Old Testament. They listened to His teaching and observed His works. There was evidence by which they could identify Him. They did not follow false teachers, because others did not have the proof or evidence that they were from God. All of this evidence today is found in the Word of God, the Bible. The “voice” of Jesus today is not a sound, but a message. So, we

hear the Lord's voice by studying and responding to the gospel (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; Psalm 119:105).

Nothing here teaches Calvinistic unconditional predestination, which says some people are chosen unconditionally to be Jesus' disciples, so when He calls they accept Him because they have no choice. But all have a choice. Salvation is conditional. Jesus calls by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), which should be preached to all (Mark 16:15). Those who accept the call are the ones who honestly consider the evidence and choose to obey (Mark 16:16). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; 1:16). This further describes how Jesus calls and how the sheep hear His voice (John 6:44,45).

People are unlike sheep, in that sheep belong to a shepherd regardless of the sheep's choosing. They are physically purchased or born into the flock. But people must choose whether or not to be in the Good Shepherd's flock. We make this choice by choosing or refusing to follow His call through the word.

It is interesting that Jesus said the shepherd calls the sheep "by name." There is a personal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. This is literally true with sheep. As with other domesticated animals, the caregivers often name each one and take a personal interest in each. When the owner calls, he calls by name so the one that comes is the one he wants. Johnson also tells of a man who visited with a shepherd in Israel. He asked the shepherd to call a sheep by name. The shepherd did so, and immediately one sheep left the flock and came joyfully running to his shepherd. This illustrates that Jesus has a personal interest in each disciple.

This also demonstrates how the flock hears His voice. They hear His voice one by one. That is, the flock is His, because each individual sheep is His. The flock follows Him, because each individual sheep follows him. Other sheep may go in other directions following other shepherds, but each individual sheep in this flock follows this shepherd. They are not following the flock; they are following the shepherd. Their trust is not in the flock but in the shepherd. The leader is the shepherd, not the flock. Each one follows, because each one knows the shepherd personally.

This illustrates the individual responsibility of each person to choose to serve the Lord. No one can do this for us and no one can make the choice for us. This choice must be made on the basis of a personal commitment to the Lord, not to the church or the people. This commitment must cause each sheep to follow the shepherd. That is, each one must obey the shepherd's commands. There is no promise of safety, providence, or protection for those that wander off and refuse to follow. Following requires obedience, which is required of all disciples (see on John 8:31,32).

The fold appears to represent a position of security and protection for the sheep or disciples of Jesus. This might seem to represent the church, yet v9 speaks of going in and out of the fold, and v16 speaks of having sheep that are not of the fold. That cannot fit the church. It is true that the church is the relationship in which Jesus places all saved people (Acts 2:47), but we do not go in and out of that relationship with His approval. Nor does He have more than one true church (see on v16). Perhaps a better view is that the fold simply represents the protection Jesus gives His people, and going out to find pasture (v9) represents Jesus' provision of spiritual nourishment. So, going into the fold for protection and going out for nourishment simply expresses Jesus' provision of all that we need: protection and nourishment. V16 will use the word in a more specific sense. Being in the church is better expressed by being in the flock, one of Jesus' sheep (disciples).

10:6-8 - Jesus is the door of the sheep

The Jews did not understand Jesus' illustration, so He explained further. He said that He is the door of the sheep and all who came before Him were thieves and robbers.

Like many illustrations, this one does not fit perfectly with real life. In real life, the shepherd cannot also be the door of the sheep. Yet, Jesus here is represented by both the shepherd (v11), and the door of the sheep (v7).

The door is the means of entrance. Jesus not only provides care and protection for His sheep, He is also the means by which they can enter the place of safety. He makes it possible for us to pass from the world with its spiritual death and danger into the security of His protection. He made this possible by offering us forgiveness of sins through His blood. But v9 shows that other blessings besides salvation are also included.

But there were others who claimed to provide for the sheep and who wanted the sheep to follow them. These were thieves and robbers. They did not have legitimate claims that the sheep should follow them nor could they prove their claims. "All" who came before refers, not to Old Testament prophets, but to others who claimed to be Christ and perhaps to any other false teachers. They wanted the sheep to follow them, but their claims were not legitimate. The only ones who would follow them were not the true sheep.

10:9,10 - Jesus provides for His sheep, but the thief destroys them

As the door, Jesus provides the means for the sheep to obtain what they need. If they enter by Jesus, they can be saved. This surely refers to forgiveness of sins, which can be obtained only through Jesus (Acts 4:12).

But the door provides access to other blessings too. The door allows the sheep to go in and out and find pasture — spiritual nourishment. Sheep need nourishment to live and grow. But they are foolish and cannot find pasture and drink for themselves. The shepherd must lead them to it. Jesus provides this need by feeding us on His word so we can grow and be strong (Psalm 23:2; Ezek. 34:2,23; 1 Pet. 2:2; Col. 1:9-11).

The thief, however, has no interest in providing for the nourishment or well being of the sheep. He steals the sheep for his own gain, not for the benefit of the sheep. He will kill them, destroy them, harm them, misuse them in any way that he thinks is to his advantage regardless of the effect on the sheep.

In the same way, false teachers do not work for the good of the sheep (though of course they must claim to do so or no sheep would follow them). They really just want to “fleece” the sheep. They may want to get rich off them, become popular or famous or powerful, or in some other way use them for their own personal pleasure. Even if they are sincere but themselves deceived, still they are unwittingly leading the sheep to their destruction.

Jesus, in contrast, works for the real good of the sheep. He provides what they need to have life and have it abundantly. He gave forgiveness so they need not die, but He also gives spiritual nourishment to provide for their life and continued growth. This is provided abundantly.

Note that Jesus is abundant in His care for us. We should not fear that our needs will not be met. Does our shepherd not love and care for us? How then will He let us be lost, if we truly strive to please Him? He wants us saved and will help us find the means and the strength to go on serving Him, if we will truly trust Him and willingly submit to Him.

This does not mean, as materialistic modernists think, that Jesus promises to give us physical wealth and health in this life. He speaks, not of physical blessings, but spiritual. His people suffer physically in this life like other people do, but we have abundant spiritual blessings and the hope of eternal life.

10:11-13 - The good shepherd compared to the hireling

Jesus then plainly identifies Himself in His illustration as being the Good Shepherd (cf. Psalms 23; Ezekiel 34; 37:24; Isaiah 40:11; Zech. 11:7; Jeremiah 23). He loves and cares for the sheep, even to the point of giving His life for the sheep. Consider the example of David (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

Sheep are among the most defenseless of animals. They have many natural enemies, such as wolves, bears, and lions. They have little means to protect themselves, and domesticated sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd to protect them. Likewise, by ourselves alone, Jesus' disciples are unable to defend ourselves against

the Devil, the roaring lion who seeks to spiritually devour us (1 Peter 5:8). But we can resist him using the means the Good Shepherd provides.

At times, however, all of us have wandered astray and allowed Satan to capture us (1 Peter 2:24,25). To rescue us, Jesus had to die on the cross in our place. Sometimes a shepherd hazards his own life to save the sheep because he genuinely cares about them (Luke 15:3-7). Jesus has that kind of love and care for us. He does not want Satan to destroy us, so He was willing to die on the cross in our place to give us the hope of salvation.

Jesus then brought another person into the illustration — the hireling. A hireling is one who does not own the sheep, but cares for them only for pay. The Bible teaches that a preacher is worthy of his hire (1 Timothy 5:17,18), so being paid is not itself the problem. The problem is that some people do the work only if they are paid. If they see no personal benefit, they don't do the work.

The hireling does not own the sheep, so he does not have love and concern for them as their owner would have. He may be willing to do some work for the sheep to earn his pay; but he is not going to endanger himself in any way, since he does not really care for the sheep. If severe danger comes, he flees for his own safety, not caring that destruction results to the sheep.

This seems to illustrate middle-of-the-road compromisers. Unlike thieves, their motives are not overtly malicious. They do not seek personally to harm the sheep or even to misuse them for their own purposes. But neither do they really love them. They lead them, but don't care much about their well being. When God's people face sin or any problem that threatens them, hirelings would not take the firm stand needed to help the people. They value their own safety and convenience more than the salvation of the people. Jesus was not like that, but would even give His life for the people whom He loved. Cf. Zechariah 11:17.

The hirelings may have represented others of the Jewish rulers who really provided some care for the people and perhaps were not selfishly seeking to benefit at the expense of God's people. But they were compromisers and would not stand against the false teachers who harmed the people. Hirelings do not themselves do harm to God's people, but neither do they protect them as is needed. They may not teach false doctrine, but they will not risk their own reputation, inconvenience, etc., in speaking out against it and opposing those who do teach it. There are still such people today.

10:14,15 - The Good Shepherd knows both the sheep and the Father

Jesus here repeated that He is the Good Shepherd (see notes on v 11), and that He will lay down His life for the sheep (see notes on v11), in contrast to the hirelings who flee in the face of danger.

He said further that he knows which sheep are his, and the sheep know Him (see notes on vv3-5). He compared this to the fact He knows the Father and the Father knows Him. He had earlier said that the Jews did not know Him or His Father (8:54,55). But He knew the Father, and in the same way He knows His sheep.

Again, as in vv 3-5, shepherds in that day could tell their sheep from others, and the sheep would recognize and follow their own shepherd. Does a man know and recognize his own father? Of course, and so Jesus knew His Father, and in a similar way knows His sheep.

This should be a great encouragement to the true sheep: the Good Shepherd knows us just as sure as He knows the Father! How can anyone doubt that Jesus knows His Father? He will not mistake the Father for an enemy or an enemy for the Father. Likewise, if we truly follow Jesus, He will not mistakenly treat us as frauds. He will not overlook us or fail to protect us, though many for whom He does not care may surround us. We can rest assured in the care of the Good Shepherd, so long as we diligently follow Him. And even if we stray, He will pursue us to bring us back. He even died to save us. Surely, He will not lightly let us be lost!

At the same time, Jesus' illustration should serve to warn the false sheep and the false teachers. If we are not His true sheep, He will not honor and reward us. He will make no mistake. If we teach error, we can expect Jesus to oppose us with all His might through His word. He knows who are and are not His true sheep, just as surely as He knows who is and is not His Father.

10:16 - Other sheep from outside "this fold" will hear his voice and become one flock

In this illustration, the flock represents the church. "This fold" represents the Jews, to whom Jesus was speaking. The sheep that are not of this fold represent Gentiles who would (in the future) hear Jesus voice and be brought into the one flock, the church.

From the very beginning, Jesus intended for people of all nations to follow Him. Cf. Eph. 2:13-18; Acts 10:34,35 (see 10:1-11:18); 2:38,39; chap. 15; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Gal. 3:28; etc. All saved people are added by Jesus to His one church over which He is the Head and sole authority: Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20; etc. This is the only viewpoint that fits all passages of Scripture, and surely fits the context here as Jesus spoke to the Jews of "this fold."

As illustrated previously, a fold in that time might enclose sheep of many flocks all sheltered together at night. In the morning, different shepherds would come and each would call his sheep and they would separate themselves from the other flocks to follow Him. Jesus is saying that He would call some sheep from the Jewish fold, and many would follow Him (but some Jews would not follow Him). But there were other folds to which He would also extend His call, and some people from those folds would also follow Him.

Speculators have had a field day with the various folds of this verse and what they refer to. Some claim this represents people in the eastern world who followed the Bible and people in the Americas who received other revelation (such as the Book of Mormon). Others say it represents various modern nations or nationalities. But all such views are speculation having no shred of real proof. And such theories invariably contradict the Bible on many points.

Others even claim that the folds represent people of different denominations, so they use the passage to rebuke anyone who condemns denominational division and teaches that there is only one true church. Yet, the Bible clearly condemns denominational division (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:25; Galatians 5:19-21; John 17:20,21; Luke 11:17; Romans 14:19; 16:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:4-6).

The verses already cited prove there is only one true church, and this passage simply confirms that view. Just as there is only one true Shepherd, so He has just **one** flock, not many different, contradictory flocks. Incredibly, people are using the passage to prove exactly the opposite of what the Lord said. He plainly said He wanted all His sheep to be in **one flock**, just as surely as there is only one shepherd. We have no more right to believe that God will accept many different flocks than He will accept many different chief shepherds.

For further discussion denominational division as compared to Jesus' one true church, see articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

10:17,18 - Jesus would lay down his own life

Because Jesus was willing to lay down His life for the sheep, His Father loved Him. Jesus then plainly stated that, though He knew He was going to die, it would not be because these Jews and His enemies would overpower Him and take His life against His will. On the contrary, no one could take it from Him if He was determined to stop them. He could call 12 legions of angels to stop it (Matt. 26:53).

He had power from the Father to lay down His life and power to take it up again. Therefore, when He died, He would be dying because His love for His sheep led Him to willingly lay down His own life. It would be a voluntary sacrifice. Though others would slay Him, they could not do so if He chose to stop them. This makes it a real sacrifice

and therefore something for which we too ought to love Him above all others.

Note also that Jesus here plainly said He would take up His life again (cf. 2:19-22). He is here predicting not only His death but also His resurrection from the dead. And again, we are clearly shown that Jesus knew all this ahead of time. He here acts as a prophet predicting His own death and resurrection. When the prediction was fulfilled, it would offer further proof that He was truly from God.

10:19-21 - The words of Jesus again divide the Jews

Now again, just as in 7:43 (cf. 9:16 and others), the people were divided over His sayings. Some thought he had a demon and was insane, so people should not listen to Him (see 8:52; etc.). But others thought He could not have a demon, since He had opened the eyes of the blind (cf. 9:29-33,16). See notes on these other passages for further discussion.

We are shown again that Jesus spoke truth, even when He knew it would lead to confrontation. It simply is not true that He and His faithful servants will always be peaceable, even if it means submitting to error. He stood for truth, even knowing that it would result in conflict. But the conflict was the fault of those who would not accept the truth, not the fault of those who taught it. As long as some people are bound to accept error, faithful teaching of truth will lead to division, strife, and conflict. We should stand as He did, even when similar problems result.

Specifically, we see again that, when people did not accept Jesus, they attacked Him as having a demon and being from the devil. Truthfully, this is the only fair alternative to accepting His claims as true. If we do not accept His claims, then it is folly to say we still think He is a good man and a great religious teacher. If His claims are not true, then He is not a good man at all, but is from the devil.

But we need to be honest with the evidence. Those who appealed to the evidence on this occasion, concluded that His words were not those of a demon-possessed man. He did not speak like a crazy man would be expected to speak. Rather, He gave calm, reasoned responses based on evidence. He could answer all His opponents' arguments and answer them convincingly. And His miracles, such as the healing of the blind man, could not possibly be harmonized with the view that He was from Satan. Satan could never empower anyone to do what Jesus could do.

This is the proper approach to the issue. Remember that the healing of the blind man in chap. 9 is what had provoked this entire discussion. Those who deny Jesus' real nature want to dismiss or ignore the evidence of His miracles. Those who focus on His miracles find no alternative but to accept His claims as true. And note again that the people who were there could not deny the reality of the miracle. They

had tried to disprove it but could not. They could not avoid the conclusion that He is who He claimed to be.

10:22-42 - Further Conflict at the Feast of Dedication

10:22,23 - Jesus in Solomon's porch at the Feast of Dedication

Further discussion with these unbelieving Jews occurred at the Feast of Dedication. This was in the winter. This feast was also called the Feast of Lights (modern Hanukkah), and commemorated the time when the Maccabees cleansed the temple and rededicated it to the service of God (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). As such, it was not a required Old Testament holy day. Even though it celebrated a religious event, it was more like a national holiday.

Jesus was walking in a porch of the temple called Solomon's porch. This was not part of the actual temple itself, but was a large covered area in the temple grounds. Later, the early church often used it as a place for meeting and teaching - cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12. This demonstrates that it was a large enough area to accommodate very large crowds where everyone could yet hear one who was speaking.

10:24,25 - The Jews demand that Jesus affirm or deny that He was the Christ

The Jews confronted Him again, surrounding Him, and challenging Him to tell them plainly whether He was the Christ. It is likely they were again looking for something to use against Him. Had He plainly answered, they would have just rejected it again. So, He simply pointed out that they had abundant evidence on which to base their conclusion. He had answered the question and they would not accept the answer. Why should He answer again?

It is true that He had not given them direct statements, such as He had given others. Compare His statements to them in 5:19ff; 8:36,56,58 to the statements in 4:25,26; 9:35-37. Nevertheless, no one who had really listened to His statements could deny that He had answered this question affirmatively. But what is more, He had given the proof that confirmed the answer. He again called their attention here to the proof: the works (miracles) He did in His Father's name. He and others had appealed to this proof repeatedly (3:2; 5:36; see notes above on 10:21). It is also this same proof that His disciples later repeatedly appealed to in order to convince unbelievers (Acts 2,3,10, etc.)

Note that Jesus Himself plainly claimed that His miracles answered the question as to whether He is the Christ. What answer can they give other than an affirmative answer: He is the Christ? To use Jesus' miracles as evidence to confirm His claims is not a misuse of them; on the contrary, this is exactly the primary purpose of His mir-

acles. This is the same proof honest people today must consider, and it is the same proof we should offer to those who doubt. When people today doubt who Jesus is, we should do as He did here: point out the evidence, then call on them to consider what conclusion that evidence leads to. We should use the same approach when confronted by any who are confrontational to our stand for truth: instead of beginning with direct answers, call attention to the evidence.

10:26-29 - No one can snatch Jesus' sheep from His hand or His Father's hand

Jesus stated again that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (10:3-5). The reason these Jews did not follow Him was that they were not His sheep. They would not accept the truth that He taught, regardless of the evidence for it. Again, the problem was not a lack of proof but an attitude problem in the hearers (see notes on 8:43-47,55; 5:38,45-47; etc.). People can know whether or not Jesus spoke the truth, if they truly want to do the Father's will – 7:17. These men were confused because they were not dedicated to doing the Father's will, and that is why they were not among Jesus' sheep!

He said then that He gives eternal life to His sheep and they will never perish. In fact, no one can pluck them out of His hand, nor out of His Father's hand, and His father is greater than all. He had earlier promised eternal life to those who believe in Him (8:51; 6:68,27,40,47,54; 3:15ff; etc.) Here He says that, if His sheep will truly listen to Him (hear His voice) and follow Him, no force outside themselves can ever cause them to be lost. This is a wonderful promise.

Does this prove "once saved, always saved"?

Some claim this promise is so unconditional that, if a person has been forgiven of sin, his soul cannot be lost no matter how wickedly he lives. This is a major proof text used for "once saved, always saved." However, consider the following: (See also notes on 3:36.)

The context gives conditions – vv 27,28.

Note the repetition of the word "**and**." The Lord Himself tied receiving life and never perishing to **hearing Jesus and following Him**. These are conditions, exactly like other passages teach (John 15:1-6; Acts 8:12-24; Romans 6:12-18; 8:12-17; Galatians 5:1-4; 6:7-9; 1 Corinthians 9:25-10:12; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22.)

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus protects His sheep so no one can destroy them, **as long as the sheep hear Jesus and follow Him**. But what if they **cease** to hear and follow, as the above verses show they can do?

“Pluck” refers to an outside force.

“Pluck” (KJV) or “snatch” (NKJV, ASV) means “to seize, carry off by force” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). This is what Jesus said a thief might do (vv 1,8,10,12). Jesus is not here denying that the sheep can wander away and be lost. He is affirming that neither Satan nor any outside force can steal believers from the Lord, as long as they remain faithful to Him. It is the thief and the wolf that cannot snatch us away.

Other passages show that we must “resist the devil,” and then we have assurance he will flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9; Ephesians 6:10-18). What happens if, through negligence or willful rebellion, we wander away from the protection of Jesus’ fold?

Sheep can stray from the shepherd’s protection.

Luke 15:3-7 – 100 sheep belonged to the shepherd (vv 4,6), yet one became **lost**.

Acts 20:28-30 – Wolves may enter among the flock, speak perverse things, and **draw away** the disciples. They cannot compel us to follow them and be lost. We have the power to choose to continue following the Lord’s voice. But false teachers can **lure** us, attract us, and tempt us.

1 Peter 5:8,9 – Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour us. If we do not withstand him, he can capture and destroy us. But we can withstand him if we have **faith and vigilance**. This is exactly what Jesus is promising in John 10 – no more and no less (John 17; 6:37-40; 1 Peter 2:25).

If sheep cannot possibly stray, even of their own free will, then that would deny our free moral power to choose. We could not become lost even if we wanted to!

Indeed, this passage contains a great promise that we should all appreciate. Jesus is the Good Shepherd there to protect us so no wolf or thief can steal us from Him. But we must be diligent to continue serving Him for this promise to be true.

For further discussion of once saved, always saved, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

10:30 - Jesus again affirms His unity with the Father

Jesus had stated that no one could snatch a believer out of His hand or His Father’s hand. Then He proceeded to affirm that this was really one and the same thing, since He and His Father are one. This is not saying they are one and the same individual person or being, but that they are one in nature and work. Hence, a person can no more take a believer away from Jesus than he could from the Father.

The necessary consequence of this statement is that Jesus is claiming unity with God in a way other people do not have. He is claiming Deity. See notes on 8:58; 1:1; 20:28; etc.

Some people, however, argue this means Jesus and His Father are the same Being or Person, and hence there is just one being in the Godhead: “Jesus only.” The Father and the Spirit are just different titles or different parts of that individual, etc.

We agree there is one God, but the question is: **how** is God “one” — in what sense? Is it one individual, or is there some other sense in which three individuals could be “one”?

John 17:20-23 explains **how** the Father and Son are **one** — even as believers should be one. We are not one individual, but many different individuals. We are united as one body, one church, united in faith, practice, goals, character, etc. The inspired comparison is that there is **one God** or Godhead that consists of plural members, just as there is **one church** that consists of many members (Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:22,23; 2:14,16; 4:1-6,16; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; etc.)

In many passages the pronouns for Jesus and His Father imply plural individuals (“we,” “us,” “I and Thou,” “I am not alone,” etc.). In fact, this very passage itself implies plural individuals: “I and my Father” (an individual and his father make two individuals). See notes on John 1:1 showing in greater detail that Jesus and His Father both possess Deity, yet are two separate individuals.

Statements affirming the oneness of God are intended to contrast to the plural gods of heathen idol worship, not to deny there is a plurality of individuals in the one true God. Those contexts are not discussing the relationship of Father and Son, for example, but are contrasting the true God to the plurality of different gods such as heathen idol worshipers embrace — gods having different character, authority in different areas of life or different areas of the earth, and often disagreeing and even warring among themselves in their beliefs, purposes, teachings, and their wills for men. We worship, not such gods as these, but a united, harmonious God with one will and plan for us.

For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

10:31-33 - The Jews attempt to stone Jesus

The Jews recognized, properly, that Jesus was claiming Deity. They were convinced, however, that He was just a man, not God in the flesh. If they were right, He would be committing blasphemy to claim oneness with God, and blasphemy was punishable by death. So, they took stones to kill Him. Cf. 8:59.

Jesus responded by calling attention again to His miracles: His good works. He had done many, and obviously the power had to come from God. So, He asked which one of them was their justification for stoning Him. Of course, He knew they were not stoning Him for the

miracles, but His intent was to point out that, in determining to stone Him, they were again overlooking His miracles.

No matter how many miracles He did proving He was from God, they were determined to find fault with Him. They ignored the evidence and attacked anything that seemed to imply that He was from God. But if the evidence was valid, then He was from God and there was no grounds to attack Him. They ought instead to have accepted and followed Him. So, He called attention to His miracles and asked which of them was grounds for killing Him.

They responded that it was not His good works that led them to seek to kill Him but the fact He claimed to be God, though He was a man. This, of course, assumed without proof the issue to be decided — i.e., that Jesus was just a man. If He was who He claimed to be and who the miracles proved Him to be, then He was not just a man but was the Son of God. So, their whole position again is based on their preconceived determination not to admit that He was from God.

But note again that the Jews here recognized Jesus' statement as a claim to Deity. The idea that Jesus claimed Deity is not something invented by the disciples hundreds of years after He died. The issue arose during Jesus' own lifetime based on His own statements. Even His enemies recognized that this was the import of His statements.

And note also that the deeds of a religious teacher must not be separated from His words. Jesus' claimed to be the Son of God, Savior of the world, etc., he taught the truths of the gospel, but then He proved that all this was true and He really was from God by the miraculous deeds He did. There can be no explanation for these deeds except that God did them through Jesus. Therefore, we ought to believe His words. The Jews attempted to ignore Jesus' miracles and judge Him entirely on the basis of His teachings and whether or not they agreed with His teaching. This is improper. A man who claims to be a prophet must be judged on the total evidence of his deeds and his words, as Jesus claimed here.

10:34-36 - Jesus cites an Old Testament passage calling men "gods"

Jesus' response is difficult in several ways. He cited a passage in which men were called "gods" — Psalm 82:6. In this passage, the inspired writer was, apparently, speaking to the judges of Israel calling them gods. This is confusing, but apparently the idea is that they were representatives of God, acting in God's place for the people. Hence, they are spoken of as gods. The word does not, of course, here mean that they really possessed Deity.

We may compare this to Exodus 4:16; 7:1,2, where God said Moses would be "as God" to Aaron. Translators added the word "as" (in 7:1,2), so the statement is that Moses was God to Aaron. This is explained to mean that God would reveal His word to Moses, then Moses

would act as prophet in passing God's words on. But Moses would pass the words to Aaron, who would then be Moses' spokesman. So, Moses stood in relationship to Aaron like God stood in relationship to Moses. This explains the significance of the statement in Psalms 82. The judges were not gods in fundamental nature, just as Moses did not have the nature of God. But the role they filled made them like gods to the people, as Moses had a role in relation to Aaron that was like God.

Jesus appealed to this passage in their "law" — that which they themselves accepted as authority. He then argued that, if the Scriptures so spoke, how could they object if He Himself claimed to be the Son of God, since He obviously had evidence that God the Father had sent Him into the world?

Jesus' argument apparently stopped them temporarily from proceeding with their intent to kill Him. He could show where other men were called gods, so why should they object if He claimed to be one with God? They had to ponder this one.

Yet, it is difficult to see why Jesus would make the argument, since it could be taken to mean that He was just a "god" in the sense these men were — i.e., not God in His fundamental essence or nature. The best answer I can find is that Jesus is answering a misconception they may have gotten from His statement that He and His Father were one, and He is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

It is possible they assumed that He meant (as some people today assume from this passage and others) that He was the same person as the Father or that He was denying that He was a man. His statement here would correct that possible misconception. He was not claiming to **be** the Father. Nor was He denying that He was a man. By citing this passage, He showed that the term "god" could be used for people who were human and who were not the Father. Hence, it was not blasphemy for the term to be so used for Him.

On the other hand, we must not conclude from this, as some have, that Jesus is here **just** claiming to be a man who represented the Father, like these Old Testament judges had been. The claims elsewhere show this is not the case. He is not denying His humanity, but He is claiming Deity. He was both God and man.

So apparently, He is reasoning from the lesser to the greater. These men, who were **just** humans, could be called "gods," and even these Jews could not deny it since it was in their own law. But surely Jesus had presented much evidence (see next verses) that He too was from God and that He was much greater than those judges had been. Surely, He was at least as great as these Old Testament judges, and therefore it was not proper to stone Him if He used the term "god" for Himself.

Note that Jesus powerfully confirmed the authority of Scripture by saying "the Scripture cannot be broken." This showed the high esteem

with which He held the Scriptures. People today, who claim to be Christians yet who question or deny the authority of Scripture, need to consider Jesus' statement here. If He so esteemed Scripture, and if we are His followers, then shouldn't we likewise esteem Scripture?

Never did Jesus try to excuse disobedience to Scripture, as some today do, claiming that the men were just writing their own human beliefs, or that God gave them the ideas but the men might have made mistakes in how they expressed them, or that the message might have been lost or changed in the centuries since it had been written, or that the meaning had been lost in translation, etc. Men today try to make all kinds of such excuses. But Jesus never did. He respected Scriptures and so should we.

10:37,38 - Once again Jesus appealed to the evidence of His works

If the people had trouble believing Jesus' claims, they needed to accept the conclusion proved by His works. He had to be from God. There was no other sensible explanation for His miracles. They surely had no grounds therefore to kill Him, for His very miracles proved God was working through Him. To kill Him would be to oppose God.

He expressed His relationship with God by saying the Father was in Him and He in His Father. This again implies Deity (though not so directly as in v30). Yet, some again misunderstand. Some today claim that, since the Father is in the Son, this proves they are the same individual — the Father is the Spirit that dwells in the Son's body. See notes on v30.

However, many other passages speak of separate persons being "**in**" one another. To say one is "**in**" the other does not prove they are the same individual. For example, Christians are "**in Christ**" and "**in the Father**"; and Father and Son abide "**in**" us — John 14:20,23; 15:4-7; 3:21; 6:56; Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-38; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 1:1; 3:8,9; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 5:14; 1 John 2:6,24; 3:24; 4:12-16. Do these verses prove that we are the same individual or personal being as the Son or the Father?

(Note also that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians — 2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Again, John 17:20-23 explains the real meaning of the expression. For Jesus to be "**in the Father**," and vice-versa, simply means for them to be "**one**." "That they all may be **one**; as thou, Father, art **in me**, and **I in Thee**, that they also may be **one in Us**...; that they may be **one**, even as **we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me**, that they may be made perfect in **one**..."

To say that one person is "**in**" another simply means that they have fellowship and unity — a harmonious, united relationship. It does not mean they are one individual. (Compare John 1:18 — in the bosom of

the Father – and see again the notes on Jesus' relationship to the Father in John 1:1ff.)

10:39,40 - Jesus escapes and travels beyond the Jordan

The Jews again attempted to seize Jesus, but He escaped. Whether they simply wanted to arrest him or whether they again sought to kill Him (v31), we are not told. Perhaps His answers had given them sufficient reason to reconsider stoning him, but they were still angered by His claims that He and the Father were in one another.

Jesus finally left Jerusalem as a result of their opposition. He had been struggling with the Jewish rulers throughout this current stay in Jerusalem. Efforts had been made to mob Him, arrest Him, and kill Him. See 7:19,32,45; 8:37; 10:31,39.

It was obvious that the Jews would not accept Him. No doubt Jesus knew this all along, but He had continued teaching to provide evidence to any in the multitudes who might be honest and also to prove conclusively that there was no excuse for these leaders. They had their chance and could never later say that no one tried to show them the truth.

Perhaps He realized that He had now pushed the conflict as far as it could go without them killing Him, and the time had not yet come for that. He knew He was to be sacrificed at the Passover. So, He went for a time east of Jordan (beyond Jordan) to the place where, some time earlier, John had been baptizing (see notes on 1:28). Here the people were more receptive, so He had one final period of safety before returning to Jerusalem for the final confrontation that led to His death.

10:41,42 - Many in the area east of Jordan come to believe in Jesus

The people there, obviously, were familiar with John and His teaching. They remembered what John had said about Jesus (see chap. 1). They concluded that what he had said about Jesus was true, and they believed in Him.

Note that John did no miracles. None were ever recorded, and here we are told directly that he did not do them. Nevertheless, the people accepted him as a prophet.

So far as we know, most prophets did miracles to confirm their revelations were from God (see Mark. 16:20; Acts 14:3; etc.). Those that did not do miracles themselves, had people in company with them that did miracles. John is about the closest there is to an exception to this, and even He worked to prepare the way for Jesus, who surely did many great miracles. Hence, had there been any doubt about John as a prophet, the fulfillment of His work in Jesus and His miracles removes all doubt.

John 11

Chap. 11 - The Resurrection of Lazarus

This account describes Jesus' great miracle in raising Lazarus from the dead. Only John records this miracle. Although other writers record other events in which Jesus raised the dead, some people wonder why none except John records this great miracle. There may be various reasons that are not recorded.

John 12:9-11 says that, after this miracle, the Jews wanted to kill Lazarus to eliminate the evidence that Jesus had raised him. John apparently wrote much later than the other gospel writers. So, some commentators have supposed that perhaps the earlier writers did not record the miracle in order to minimize the threat to Lazarus' life. The more they spread the claim of the miracle, the more likely the Jews would be to want to eliminate the evidence by killing Lazarus. But by the time John wrote, so many years had passed that Lazarus may have been dead or at least the event had happened so long ago that the threat to Lazarus was minimal. But the miracle did need to be recorded, so John went ahead and added it to the list of miracles for which we have eyewitness record.

Another explanation that has been suggested is that John was the only one of the four writers who had witnessed the event first-hand. Perhaps some of the apostles were elsewhere at the time. If Matthew was elsewhere and Peter was also elsewhere (since he is considered to be Mark's main source), maybe they simply left the miracle for John to record, since John was a first-hand witness.

In any case, there is no reason to doubt this miracle or to believe that the other apostles doubted it, since they do record Jesus' resurrection and other events in which Jesus raised the dead. Remember, John records this as an eyewitness. The record needed to be written by an eyewitness, so John records it before his death.

11:1,2 - Introduction to Lazarus, Mary, and Martha

The account here introduces us to some new characters who have a prominent role in the life of Jesus. They are two sisters and their brother, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We are told that they lived in Bethany, which was about two miles from Jerusalem (see v18), across the Mount of Olives to the east (see ***map***). During the last part of His ministry before His death, Jesus lodged in Bethany (Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:11,12), perhaps in the home of these three.

We are told that, on another occasion, Mary anointed Jesus with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair. This has apparently not yet happened, but John wrote after these events, so he includes a note about it here to help identify the people (see notes on 12:1-11; cf. Luke 7:38). Since there are a number of women named “Mary” in the gospel accounts, John distinguishes this Mary by referring to another event that involved her.

On still another occasion, Jesus taught at their home and rebuked Martha for being so concerned about the meal that she wanted Mary to help with the serving instead of spending time listening to Jesus’ teaching (Luke 10:38-42).

11:3,4 - The sisters inform Jesus about Lazarus’ sickness

About this time, the sisters sent a message to Jesus telling Him that Lazarus (spoken of as the one whom Jesus loved – cf. v5) was sick. Perhaps they hoped He would come and heal him. In any case, it must have been a serious illness, and they must have had a quite close relationship with Jesus; otherwise, they would not have bothered Him with such a matter in the midst of His preaching work.

But Jesus was quite deliberate about the whole thing. He said the sickness was not to death but for God’s glory and for the Son of God to be glorified. (See notes on 9:3, where He said a similar thing about the blind man.) The point is not that Lazarus would not die, for he obviously did so. But his death would not be the final result or main result accomplished by the sickness. Instead, glory to God and Jesus would result. (This is a “not ... but” expression, as described on John 6:27.)

Clearly, Jesus knew Lazarus was going to die and He would raise Him. Yet, He calmly proceeded to let Lazarus die, though this would cause great grief to Himself and to others. No doubt, He had other affairs to take care of; and remember that going back to the vicinity of Jerusalem was dangerous for Him (see vv 7ff). Yet, He could have healed Lazarus without going to see him, as He had the nobleman’s son (4:46-54). His entire manner showed that He was deliberately allowing nature to take its course, knowing that He would raise Lazarus and thereby do a great miracle that would give convincing proof of who He was.

Therefore, the purpose of miracles is clearly demonstrated here. If, as some claim, the main purpose of miracles was to relieve human suffering so good people do not have to suffer, why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die? Why not heal him to begin with and avoid all the grief? Clearly higher purposes were involved than relieving suffering. (In fact, some miracles actually caused suffering, as the plagues on Egypt, the blindness of Elymas, etc.) The purpose, as we have repeatedly seen, was to give evidence to confirm Jesus’ claims to be true (see notes on v15).

11:5 - Jesus is said to have loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

Jesus loved all people, but He had an especially close attachment to some people, even as we all do. This is not wrong, and we are here told that it was true even of Jesus.

Most likely, this statement is included at this point in order to assure us that Jesus did not here act out of indifference or lack of concern for Lazarus and His sisters. He chose to let Lazarus die, even though He could have prevented it and He really did love them. But Jesus did not come to prevent all human suffering. And as already explained, avoiding suffering was not the main point of His miracles. The fact He allows people to suffer does not prove He does not love them. And the fact He does not do miracles today to alleviate all suffering, even among His own people, does not in any way prove a lack of love for us.

Unfortunately, far too much has been made of this simple statement by evil people, who would do anything to ridicule good people. Some people cannot accept the fact that other people are not as evil as they are, so they take perfectly innocent truths and twist them to make it appear that good people are basically evil too. Some people claim that such statements as this prove that Jesus had sexual love for these people, that He had affairs with the sisters and even had sexual attraction for Lazarus.

Such unmitigated nonsense! Such people have no concept of a pure and holy love. To them all love means lust, and they apparently cannot conceive of anyone who loves others without sexual lust. Yet there is not a shred of evidence that Jesus ever had sexual lusts toward women, let alone had affairs with them or worse yet with men. Sexual relations inside marriage are good and holy, but outside marriage they are sinful (Heb. 13:4), and homosexuality is perversion (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 1:26,27). Jesus was sinless (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; etc.), therefore He was never guilty of such evil acts.

Yet, the Bible is filled with passages describing love that is greater than sexual love. It is a sincere concern for the well being of others. This love characterized God the Father and the Son (John 3:16; Ephesians 5:2), and ought to characterize all of us for God and for all people, even our enemies (Matt. 22:36-39; 1 Cor. 13; Rom. 13:8-10; Matt. 5:43-48). Parents ought to love their children (Titus 2:4), etc. This is pure and holy love, having nothing whatever to do with sexual lust. It is in this sense that Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And it is repulsive that we should even have to answer such foolish, evil, and groundless charges.

11:6-8 - After waiting two days, Jesus announced the intent to go to Judea

After hearing about Lazarus' illness, Jesus waited two days (see notes on vv 3,4). He then suggested that He and His disciples go to Judea. This surprised the disciples, since He had left Judea due to the opposition of His enemies there who had determined to kill Him (10:40).

The disciples reminded Him of this and asked why He wanted to go back. Perhaps they thought He had not gone to heal Lazarus because He sought to avoid the danger facing Him in Judea. But Jesus had left Judea, because it was not yet time for Him to die. And He had not gone back to see Lazarus, because the time was not yet right for what He needed and intended to do (see on vv 3,4). Now the time was right, so He was ready to return.

11:9,10 - Jesus explains that He needed to work while He could

Jesus answered the disciples in a manner that reminds us of His determination to heal the blind man (9:4). While we have opportunity, we must do the work that we can do. Otherwise, the time will come when we cannot work. This is illustrated by daylight versus darkness. In the day one can walk, travel safely, work, etc., because his activities are lighted by this world's light (the sun). But at night He stumbles, because he does not have light.

Jesus had said that He is the light of the world, but that appears to be a different illustration. His point here seems to be the same as in 9:4, that there was work He needed to do (in this case doing miracles to prove who He was). He knew soon His life would end and He could not work anymore. But meantime He needed to accomplish what He could while He still had the opportunity.

11:11-15 - Jesus explains his intent to wake Lazarus from sleep

Jesus explained further His reason for going to Judea again: Lazarus was asleep and Jesus was going to waken him. Note that Jesus already knew Lazarus had died, though the message that had been sent Him said only that He was sick. He evidently knew this miraculously.

The disciples misunderstood Him, as they so often did, this time thinking He meant a literal sleep. So they said Lazarus would wake up, so why did they need to go? They evidently did not want to go, doubtless because of the danger Jesus faced. So, Jesus had to plainly tell them that He meant Lazarus was dead. Note that the result of this is to leave no doubt regarding Jesus' intentions. He knew Lazarus was dead but still intended to go "wake Him up." He intended all along to raise Him from the dead.

Further, He said He was glad He had not been there earlier, because now He could go, do a great miracle, and give them proof as the basis for their faith. Note here the plain statement as to the purpose of the miracle, and why He had not gone to stop Lazarus from dying. This way it made a much more powerful and convincing proof. He had healed many people of sickness. This time He intended to give the ultimate proof of His power even over death.

Many other passages speak of death as sleep (2 Chronicles 14:1; Psalms 13:3; Job 14:12; Daniel 12:2; Acts 7:60; Matt. 27:52; Mark 5:39; 1 Corinthians 15:6,18,20; 1 Thess. 4:13ff; 2 Peter 3:4). The idea of the expression appears to be that the dead person looks like people do when they are asleep. But more important still, to God they are as though they are asleep, because as Jesus said here, God someday will waken them all in the resurrection.

11:16 - Thomas resigns himself to dying with Jesus

Thomas called Didymus (the twin) spoke to the other disciples that they should all go and die with Jesus. It was clear Jesus was determined to go and they could not stop Him. So, they should remain with Him, and die also if He dies.

Note how this contrasts to their attitudes when He did finally die. The time of that death was drawing near. When it came, they fled. And after the resurrection, Thomas doubted (20:24-29). Yet, here Thomas expressed devotion and courage.

11:17-19 - Jesus arrived near Bethany

Bethany, we are told, was close to Jerusalem, about two miles away (see notes on v1). By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (v39 says he had been dead four days). Many people had gathered to comfort Mary and Martha.

John continues giving details that prove beyond reasonable doubt the greatness of the miracle. It was done on a man clearly dead. He had been dead and buried four days before Jesus even arrived on the scene. Friends and acquaintances, who knew Lazarus and the family, had gathered to mourn his death.

The size of the crowd simply made the miracle all the more amazing. Many people were present to witness the miracle. It was not done in private where some people might not know the details. There was no possibility of a hoax or fraud.

11:20-22 - Martha goes to meet Jesus

Jesus did not go to the house where Mary and Martha were mourning (v30). It appears that he wanted to go first to the tomb itself. Martha somehow heard Jesus was coming and went to meet Him, while Mary remained at the house. Presumably, Mary did not yet know about Jesus' arrival (see vv 28,29).

Martha's faith was such that she was sure Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death. This is a great statement of faith; yet great as it is, had Jesus healed Lazarus and prevented his death, that would have been small compared to what Jesus finally did.

Martha further stated she was confident that God would give whatever Jesus asked. It is not clear that she was expecting Jesus to raise Lazarus. She seemed surprised later when Jesus began to act as if He intended to do so (vv 24,39). Perhaps she was just expressing that she still had faith in Jesus and that her faith was not weakened by her brother's death. Or perhaps she just did not know what to expect. In time of death and great sorrow, people do not always know themselves exactly what they mean or expect.

11:23-27 - Jesus teaches Martha about the resurrection and leads her to confess Him

Jesus told Martha that Lazarus would rise again. The context makes it obvious that He meant this would happen miraculously even that day, but He did not specify when it would happen. Martha had believed there would be a resurrection at the last day, so she confirmed that she was confident Lazarus would rise then.

Jesus stated that He is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Him may die, but even if they do die, they will live. This is a grand and Divine claim. No one, who was just a human, could have made it, if he was honest and in his right mind. The very fact Jesus made such claims proves He is Divine or else He is not even a good man. No middle-ground position can be accepted.

The point seems to be that Jesus Himself is the one that has the power to give life and to raise people to life. He had claimed this at length in chap. 5 (see 5:21-29). The "life" in that passage, however, sometimes meant spiritual life and sometimes physical life.

It seems that Jesus is making the same point here. Jesus gave physical life to all living things at the creation (John 1:1-3). He is the firstfruits of the resurrection and will raise all men up at the last day (see also 1 Cor. 15). In that sense, even if one dies (physically), he will live again, as Jesus states here.

But the meaning is also spiritual. Jesus can give us spiritual life by forgiving our sins and reuniting us with God, even in this life (cf. Rom. 6; Col. 2:12f; etc.). In this sense, we need not die at all eternally in the second death, the lake of fire. To prove His power to give life to men, He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Note that Jesus is not here claiming, nor had He ever claimed, that believing in Him would keep people from ever dying physically. He Himself would die, and so would all His followers (Heb. 9:27). The claim is that they would yet live afterward. And if they live because of faith in Him, they can then live eternally. This is again true in the resurrection, that when we receive eternal life we will never die again. It

is also true that, when we receive spiritual life from Jesus, we need never die again spiritually (1 Cor. 10:13) and should not return to sin and death (Rom. 6).

It is not clear that Jesus here intended for Martha to understand that He was about to raise Lazarus immediately. But He wanted her to have faith in Him as the one who can give life. So, He asked about her faith, and she confessed that she believed in Him as the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world.

This is the “Good Confession” that all true believers must make to be saved. It is made elsewhere by other believers. Those who want forgiveness must have the faith and make the confession that Martha made here (Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15).

We need to imitate Martha’s faith. And with the benefit of a full revelation of the gospel, we can believe even what she did not understand. She did not understand that Jesus would raise her brother. We may not understand how or when Jesus gives life, but we must have faith in Him as the giver of life. We must believe that, if we trust Him, He will give us the life we need.

11:28-31 - Martha calls Mary to see Jesus

Martha then went to call Mary, telling her that the Teacher (Jesus) had come and wanted to speak to her. Martha did this “secretly” or quietly. Jesus had not yet come into the village, so Mary immediately went to Him. This confirms that Mary had not previously heard that Jesus had arrived (v20).

Yet, when Mary arose to go to Jesus, the Jews saw it and concluded she was going to the tomb to weep there. So, they decided to follow her. The result of this was that there were many witnesses present when Jesus raised Lazarus.

11:32-35 - Jesus meets Mary and mourns

When Mary met Jesus, she said exactly as Martha had, that, if Jesus had been present, Lazarus would not have died (cf. v21). She said this having fallen at His feet.

Mary and all the people were weeping. This caused Jesus to be troubled in spirit too. He asked where the body had been laid, so they showed Him. There He too wept.

It appears that Jesus had intended from the beginning to raise Lazarus, so one wonders why He wept. The Bible presents death as an enemy, the consequence of sin (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). Perhaps Jesus wept in sympathy with the sisters in their grief. Perhaps He wept in grief for all people who have suffered in time of death and would continue to do so. Perhaps it was the entire consequence of sin and suffering on mankind that caused Him to weep (the word for Jesus’ “groaning” often refers to anger – perhaps He felt anger for all the con-

sequences of sin). Perhaps He foresaw that He Himself would soon die in consequence of the sins of man.

In any case, His weeping shows that He truly does have compassion on mankind and it was this compassion that moved Him to come to earth to die for us. Jesus is loving and merciful. He must stand firmly opposed to sin, but this does not mean He is uncaring and harsh with the sinners (cf. Heb. 4:14-16; 2:17f). He sympathizes with our condition, and that is why He wants to help.

We too should learn to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Such compassion should motivate us to do what we can for others in their need.

11:36,37 - The Jews observe Jesus' grief

The Jews observed Jesus' sorrow. Clearly, they knew who He was and what He was reported to have done in the past. Some of them were greatly impressed by the love He had for Lazarus. Some of them stated that He had opened the eyes of the blind. They therefore reasoned that He could have kept Lazarus from dying.

It is not clear whether this was said sincerely or critically. Perhaps they spoke tongue-in-cheek. If Jesus' could really heal blind people (perhaps they still doubted this), then why did He not heal this one whom He obviously loved?

In any case, they misunderstood Jesus' motivations. He did not do miracles just because He loved people, nor to remove all suffering from people's lives. Had that been His motive, indeed He would have stopped Lazarus from dying. Instead, He let even His dearest loved ones endure the suffering and grief that is the common lot of mankind. Then He used the opportunity to work a far greater miracle than any of them expected. The result was to give great proof for His claims. Yet it shows us that removing all suffering, even from His disciples, was not the purpose of His miracles.

The result of Jesus' conduct was to give greater evidence than even the Jews proposed. Not only had he healed the blind, and not only could He have healed Lazarus, but He removed all doubt about His miraculous power by raising one who had been dead four days.

11:38-40 - Jesus calls for the tomb to be opened, and Martha questions Him

The tomb was a cave with a stone lying against it. This was a common burial arrangement, the same type later used for Jesus Himself. In fact, in many ways this resurrection is an illustration or type of Jesus' own resurrection.

Still sorrowing or groaning in Himself, Jesus went to the tomb. There He told the people to remove the stone. His intent was still not obvious. Martha objected or at least questioned Him, pointing out that Lazarus had been dead four days and would by that time have an odor

or stench. Perhaps she thought He just wanted to see the body – maybe she was not sure that He knew how long Lazarus had been dead - so she reminded Him of the unpleasant consequences.

But Martha's statement assures us of the length of time since the death. There was no doubt Lazarus was dead. His family and friends had witnessed all that happened and they were convinced he was dead. He had been dead so long decomposition would have begun. John continues to give the details that assure us of the greatness of the miracle.

Nevertheless, Jesus had a purpose in mind, so He reminded Martha that He had told her she would see the glory of God. She needed to continue to have faith that He knew what He was doing and would use the situation in the best way.

11:41,42 - Jesus gives thanks to God

They removed the stone, and Jesus prayed to God before proceeding. Some miracles seem to be more difficult or to require greater trust in God than others. Resurrection from the dead, in particular, seems often to be accompanied by prayer (see Acts 9:40; Matt. 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; 1 Kings 17:17-24).

Jesus' prayer thanked God for hearing Him, even as we should thank Him for hearing our prayers. Jesus did not express doubt but rather confidence that God heard Him (cf. James 1:5ff).

He explained that He had said what He did for the sake of the people. He Himself did not need a miracle to confirm His faith. But His purpose was that the people might believe that God had sent Him. Note once again how the Bible plainly explains the purpose of miracles. Here it is Jesus who clearly states that the miracles were done so people would believe that God had sent him. His purpose was not primarily to alleviate all suffering but to lead people to believe. That is the purpose of miracles and we need to view them in light of that purpose.

11:43-45 - Lazarus is raised

Having so prayed, Jesus cried loudly, "Lazarus, come forth!" By this simple command the miracle occurred. Why speak loudly? Surely, the same result could have been accomplished with a whisper. Perhaps it was to make sure that everyone present would know exactly what was happening. All could witness that it was by His power and intent that the miracle occurred. Hence, they would have basis for their faith and could testify to others of the event. Perhaps also it made the event more indelibly impressed on their minds.

In any case, the power was sufficient. Lazarus came forth, still bound in the grave clothes. Jesus commanded the people to remove the grave clothes and release him. The result was that many people believed in Him – i.e., the purpose of miracles was accomplished.

Why did Jesus expect the people to remove the grave clothes? Some have observed He did what would prove His claims, but He expected the people to do for themselves what they could. He gives us evidence on which to base our faith, but He expects us to do what we can in His service. Do not expect Him to do for us what we can and should do ourselves.

Note again that this incredibly great miracle demonstrates what we have repeatedly learned about the characteristics of miracles:

(1) It was unquestionably clear that a real, physical problem existed. This cannot be doubted in this case. Lazarus had been dead four days.

(2) The problem was solved immediately.

(3) The problem was completely solved, clearly and indisputably. There could be no doubt that Lazarus had been dead, and there could be no doubt at the end that he was completely alive again.

(4) The miracle was done on a local person in the presence of many witnesses, so all could know with assurance that nothing could be faked. So convincing was the evidence that even Jesus' enemies acknowledged the miracle – 11:47.

(5) In short, it was an event clearly impossible by natural means.

(6) The purpose was to confirm the claims of the inspired teacher, demonstrating Him to be from God.

Modern so-called miracle workers claim to be able to do all the miracles that Jesus and His apostles could do, but not one of them can duplicate such as this. Most won't try.

By this account, described by no other authors, John has confirmed His basic thesis that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We can know it because of His works (John 20:30,31). And remember, John was one of the apostles who accompanied Jesus to see Lazarus' family, so he spoke here as an eyewitness.

Observe the interesting point that Jesus deliberately postponed going to see Lazarus for the purpose of giving an even greater blessing than just a miraculous healing. We need to learn that God sometimes postpones giving us the blessing we think we need, but in the end He will give what we need. And that might be something even better than what we hoped for!

I also see in this case a rather simple demonstration of the concept of specific authority. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth." He named the specific individual who should be raised. Some day he will give a general call to resurrection, and all will hear His voice and come forth (5:28,29). But this command was specific. Though there were many dead people in the world and many no doubt nearby, yet no one else came forth. When God gives a specific instruction, it is limited in its application. We should not seek to make it broader or narrower than Jesus made it.

11:46-48 - The Jewish council acknowledges Jesus' miracles yet still opposes Him

The Pharisees had opposed Jesus' work, and had called in question His healing of the blind man (chap. 9). Their opposition had eventually led to His leaving Jerusalem. Before He came back to raise Lazarus, His disciples had questioned the wisdom of returning. He had nevertheless returned and raised Lazarus.

Here the Pharisees learned about the miracle Jesus had performed, because some of the people who witnessed the miracle told them about it. This caused them to meet in council with the chief priests. They acknowledged how ineffective their opposition to Jesus was. They plainly admitted that Jesus was doing many signs. They were concerned that this would cause people to believe in Him and the Romans would come and take away their place and nation.

The concern seems to be that the people, if they came to believe Jesus was the Messiah, would cause an uprising in an effort to make Jesus king. The Romans would be compelled to crush the uprising, and these leaders feared this would result in the loss of the privileges they then had. Rome was in power, but continued to allow the Jews to have their own nation and their own rulers, including this council. Rebellion could lead to such opposition from Rome that they would lose what position and favor they had. These rulers persisted in misunderstanding Jesus' purposes. Such a violent uprising was never His intent (see chap. 6).

But note what really motivated them: They were concerned with their own position. This is what they do not want to lose. They seem either unaware or else unconcerned that their own statements admitted God was with Jesus. If God was with Him, why should they fear the consequences of what He was doing? Such self-contradictory views must be the result of stubborn, selfish unbelief in God and determination to have their own way. Surely if they had faith they should have known that God would work for the good of those who served Him, and in any case they should not oppose that work. But their main concern was their own position, and that motivated their opposition.

It is amazing and enlightening that even Jesus' most hardened enemies admitted He did miracles. They could not disprove them, though they had tried (chap. 9). Even when they would not accept the consequences of the miracles, yet they plainly admitted the existence of the miracles. "This man does many signs" (NKJV; "many miracles" KJV). This is overwhelming confirmation from John that the miracles did happen. The enemies could not disprove them in Jesus' lifetime. How then could anyone today, 1900+ years later, disprove them?

And note the difference between Jesus' miracles and those of modern so-called miracle workers. We can invariably show that modern "miracles" do not measure up to those of Jesus and are therefore

not true miracles. We effectively persist in denying their validity. But the enemies of Jesus could not so disprove His miracles, but had to admit them. If men today could do true miracles, we could not effectively deny them. The difference is that Jesus did undeniably true miracles, whereas what men do today are not true miracles.

And notice also that the enemies effectively acknowledged the purpose of the miracles: they would lead people to believe in Jesus. They obviously feared this, when as the leaders of God's people, they should have welcomed it. But the point is that they recognized the proper purpose of the miracles. This confirms the purpose of miracles. It also confirms how inexcusable their conduct was. They admitted the miracles and knew what they were supposed to prove, yet they still opposed Jesus!

11:49-52 - Caiaphas predicts Jesus must die

The high priest Caiaphas responded with a prophecy. The essence was that one man would die so that the whole nation could avoid perishing. He was an enemy of Jesus and no doubt did not mean the statement in the way God used it. Nevertheless, he was the high priest, and God used his statement as a prediction of Jesus' death.

It appears that what he meant was that they should try to kill Jesus in order to prevent the nation being destroyed by the Romans. This was the conclusion the council reached (v53). It was (in their view) better to kill one man than to have the whole nation destroyed.

Nevertheless, what God really meant was that the death of Jesus would lead to the spiritual salvation of the Jews and also those who were scattered abroad. This could mean the scattered Jews or perhaps people of other nations (cf. 10:16). Both would be true.

Note that God can use even false teachers to prophesy and speak His will. This man was the high priest, so God used him. Generally, however, God speaks through those who are His true servants.

11:53,54 - The council determines to kill Jesus

These rulers then began to plot to kill Jesus. They had attempted this before, but from this point on it became their settled intent. See notes on 5:16-18; 7:32,45; 8:37,59; 10:39.

To avoid this, Jesus no longer openly associated and taught among them. He went with His disciples to a city called Ephraim in the wilderness (see **map** north of Jerusalem). This time of retirement did not last long. Jesus was apparently waiting till the proper time for the final confrontation that would lead to His death. He must die as the Passover lamb. When the time came, we will see in the next chapter that He boldly entered Jerusalem and allowed the Jewish leaders to carry out their plans.

11:55-57 - The people discuss whether or not Jesus would attend the Passover

The Passover feast was approaching; so, many Jews went to Jerusalem to attend the feast as required by the law. The Passover was the annual celebration of the time God spared the firstborn Israelites when He slew the firstborn Egyptians (Ex. 12,13).

This particular Passover was the one at which Jesus would be killed as our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The time of His death was drawing near, as the high priest had predicted.

The people wondered whether He would even come to the feast, considering the opposition of the rulers. But the rulers had commanded that anyone who knew His whereabouts should report to them so they could seize Him.

The scene was set for the final confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. He had repeatedly proved He was from God. He had even done one of His most amazing miracles in their very “backyard.” They were compelled to deal with Him, and had determined their only course of action was to kill Him. Would He now stay away to avoid conflict? Or would He attend the feast and continue the confrontation, knowing His life was at stake? His followers, of course, hoped He would lead a violent uprising, even if necessary. We will see how the story unfolds in the next chapter.

John 12

Chap. 12 - Jesus Enters Jerusalem

12:1-10 - Mary Anointed Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)

12:1,2 - A dinner at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

The time of Jesus' death was drawing very near. The record here takes up six days before the Passover, which was when He was killed. So, we are here beginning to study the last week of his life. John focuses strongly on this last week, devoting nearly one half of his record to it.

Jesus returned to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead in chap. 11. See notes on Bethany in 11:1.

They prepared a meal for Jesus, Martha served, and Lazarus was at the table. People who serve God have always helped preachers by providing them with meals. This is a form of support for the preacher, providing his needs as he does his work. It is interesting that Martha served, for this seems to be typical of her. See notes on Luke 10:38-42.

Jesus was no longer seeking to avoid conflict with the Jewish leaders. The time had come for the final confrontation and His death. Knowing this, He openly entered Jerusalem for the final week of His life.

12:3 - Mary anointed Jesus

Mary honored Jesus by taking a pound of a very costly ointment called spikenard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it and wiped His feet with her hair. Spikenard was a costly perfume, probably imported, and had a fragrance that filled the house. This constituted a sign of great respect for Jesus, and perhaps resulted from Mary's gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus.

Other accounts say the ointment was in a container made of alabaster. Alabaster is a type of lime deposit (like what is found in caves). King states that such boxes are still used today to preserve spikenard.

Mark 14:3 adds that this happened in the home of Simon the leper. Apparently, this Simon was related to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Perhaps Jesus had healed him of his leprosy.

A similar but different event occurred on a different occasion in Luke 7:37-39. The two are not the same, since they occurred at significantly different times, at different places, and with different details.

Matthew and Mark do record this same event, although John's account differs slightly from the others. It is recorded before the triumphal entry, and the time is given as six days before Passover. Also, Jesus was anointed on the feet instead of the head. However, the other details are so similar that it is almost certain the two events are the same.

Most likely the ointment was placed on both Jesus' head and His feet. McGarvey explains the difference in time sequence by pointing out that Matthew gives no specific sequence. He just says this happened when Jesus was in Bethany. Numerous events are told in different orders in the different accounts. This is not a contradiction. It just is the way people tend to tell stories. Perhaps Matthew told the story when he did because it reveals somewhat the character of Judas who, in the subsequent verses, agreed to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

12:4-6 - Judas complains about this use of a valuable substance

Matthew and Mark say the disciples were indignant about this, because they thought it was wasteful to put this on Jesus. It would have been better to sell it and give the money to the poor. It was worth 300 shillings or denarii. Since a denarius was about a day's wage (Matthew 20:2), this ointment was worth almost a year's wages! This shows the great value of Mary's sacrifice to honor Jesus.

Actually, John says that the main one who was upset was Judas, but he did not say it because he cared about the poor. He said it because he kept the money of the disciples (13:29), and being a thief, he took some of it for himself!

Consider what this event reveals about the character of Judas, even before he agreed to betray Jesus (cf. 6:70). He was a greedy, covetous man, even to the point of stealing. Further, he stole money that should have been used to support Jesus and His apostles in their work of spreading the gospel. It would have been bad enough to steal from wealthy people who might not use the money profitably anyway, but he was stealing money that would have been used to help souls be saved. This shows he did not care for spiritual things, as he ought. And here he even resented money used to honor Jesus. Had it been set aside to help the poor, he would have stolen it. Such greed reveals much about Judas' character.

John ties this to that fact that Judas would later betray Jesus for money. That was an act of greed and covetousness, just as in the present account. Sometimes people think Judas was victimized by God or compelled by predestination to betray Jesus, resulting in his being lost. Others have tried to defend or justify Judas as a victim of circumstances, or perhaps even a hero!

This story, however, reveals that Judas had been evil by his own choice long before the betrayal. God did not compel him to do evil, when he betrayed Jesus. God just took Judas as he was and allowed him to do an evil deed that needed to be done. This is similar to the Jews who killed Jesus. God did not make them evil. They were already evil, as Jesus' lengthy debates with them proved. God took them as they were and allowed them to do an evil deed that needed to be done to accomplish God's plan for our salvation.

Finally, note that Jesus and His apostles had a common treasury even before He died and long before the church began. This does not, of itself, prove that such funds were used for the same purpose as the church treasury should be used. The church had not yet begun. Nevertheless, during His lifetime Jesus did institute many practices that prepared the way for what is done in the church.

12:7,8 - Jesus defends Mary's act

Jesus, however, did not share the disciples' criticism of Mary. He said she had done a good work on Him. There would always be poor people for whom they could do good, but He would not be with them long. She was, He said, anointing Him for burial.

I doubt that Mary knew Jesus was about to be buried. But if the ointment had been used to bury a dead relative, likely no one would have complained about that. Such was commonly done to honor the memory of one who died. Mary had done a similar act of honor to Jesus while He was still alive. If it would be appropriate to show such honor to Him after His death, why would it be wrong to so honor Him during His life? So, He used it as an opportunity to remind them that He was about to die and be buried. They would have Him with them for even less time than any of them realized. It was appropriate that they express their devotion for Him while He was there.

Jesus here stated a profound general truth: the poor are always with us (Deuteronomy 15:11). This is not stated to mean we should ignore them. But poverty will never be eliminated from the earth. Jesus did not come to solve all the physical problems of mankind, and He did not establish His church to do so. He knew troubles and problems would continue as long as the earth stands. We ought to show compassion for such people, but it is also good and right to honor Deity. If we wait till all the poverty is removed before we worship or give gifts to honor God, we will never honor Him.

In other accounts, Jesus predicted that the woman, for her simple and humble expression of love, would be remembered throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached. And indeed that is exactly the case, for here we read the record that memorializes her act throughout the whole world.

Jesus appreciates humble deeds when done according to His will from a sincere heart.

12:9-11 - The Jewish leaders plot also against Lazarus

Many people heard that Jesus had come (apparently still at Bethany), and they came to see Him. But many also wanted to see Lazarus. Lazarus had been raised from the dead, and people wanted to see for themselves the proof that he was alive. This caused many Jews to believe in Jesus, as was the purpose of miracles (cf. 11:45-48). Again, what so-called faith healers today have this kind of evidence that we can go and see?

The Jewish leaders, however, were determined that people should not believe in Jesus (see 11:47-53). So evil and determined were they that they even plotted to kill Lazarus to destroy the evidence for Jesus' claims. Many of the chief priests were Sadducees, who denied the existence of the resurrection. So, they may have also sought to destroy Lazarus, because he was living evidence against their doctrine.

This is incredible depth of evil. As religious leaders, these men should have accepted the miracles as proof Jesus was from God. They should have believed in Him and defended Him. Instead, they actually opposed Jesus. Worse yet, they wanted to kill Him. They justified this on the claim that He was guilty of blasphemy and violation of the Sabbath. But here they even sought to kill a completely innocent man, simply because Jesus had raised him from the dead! What crime had Lazarus committed? None whatever, but they still wanted to kill him to prevent people from believing in Jesus.

Some men, who are viewed as good and godly men, can stoop to incredible depths of evil. Even overt murder was not too extreme for these men in their determination to maintain their honor in the eyes of the people.

12:12-19 - Triumphal Entry

(cf. Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40)

12:12-16 - The people welcome Jesus to Jerusalem

Many people had come to Jerusalem early to attend the feast of the Passover. When they heard that Jesus was coming, many, who expected Him to be a king, determined to honor Him with a great procession when He entered.

Knowing this, Jesus made arrangements for an entry that would be humble. Other accounts show that He sent disciples to a nearby village to find a donkey and her colt. They were to set them loose and bring them to Jesus. This fulfilled prophecies in Isa. 62:11 and esp. Zech. 9:9. The Messiah was prophesied to come in a lowly way sitting on the foal of a donkey. The disciples obeyed, found the animals, placed garments on them, and Jesus sat upon them.

Although some commentators state that kings of Israel sometimes did ride on donkeys, yet this was a humble way to arrive, not typical of

other great earthly rulers. Today rulers and important people feel they must ride in an expensive limousine in parades. So, in that day a king might ride in a chariot with powerful horses. But to enter the capitol city riding on a donkey's foal was extremely humble. Though the Christ was predicted to be a great ruler, He was also predicted to enter Jerusalem in this humble way. Jesus here fulfilled this prophecy.

Jesus was not the kind of ruler the people had in mind. He had repeatedly said things designed to lead them to understand that His role here was spiritual (see chap. 6). In Matthew 20:28 He had told them He came to be a servant and die for others. He was using this opportunity to show them again that exaltation by human standards was not His goal.

As He entered the city, multitudes of people lined the road. They placed their garments in the pathway and cut down branches and spread them in the road. These were all ways of welcoming and honoring Him, as people do for great leaders and heroes.

The people called out expressions of honor. They called Him "Son of David" and "King of Israel" — i.e., the descendant of David who was to bear the rule on the throne of David as predicted in the Old Testament. This shows their confidence He would be king, though they misunderstood the kind of king.

"Hosanna" means "Save, we pray." It was a prayerful supplication, similar to Psalms 118:25,26. The idea seems to be a request for salvation, perhaps salvation from their enemies by the hand of the Messiah. It seems to have become an expression of honor. In any case, such demonstrations of honor would surely catch the attention of the Roman authorities, especially during the time of such a great feast. No doubt, this was part of the concern of the Jewish leaders.

It is incredible that people are so fickle. Just a few days later, these same people would be calling out, "Crucify Him!" People who do not understand God's plan can easily be swayed from truth to error.

At this point, not even the disciples understood why Jesus did things as He did. Later, however, they remembered and understood the fulfillment of prophecy.

12:17-19 - The witnesses of Lazarus' resurrection give testimony

The effect of Lazarus' resurrection continued, as those who had seen it told other people about it. Note that "witness" in the Bible refers to personal, first-hand testimony. These witnesses were there when Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb.

People were also able to meet Lazarus for themselves, not just to hear from others about his resurrection. They could, if they desired, question him. But especially they could see for themselves that he was alive. They did not have to take anyone else's word for it.

At this point, the Pharisees were frustrated. They had determined to put a stop to Jesus' popularity by any means possible, good or evil (cf. 11:47-53). Yet, it appeared that the whole world was following Jesus, and their opposition was accomplishing nothing at all. They had let all the people know that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be cast out of the synagogue (vv 42,43). It was generally known that they wanted to arrest Him, or even to kill Him. Yet, here He entered into their very stronghold to the open acclaim of great multitudes of people!

To the eyes of men, Jesus was at the height of His popularity. Who could believe that just a few days later He would be executed as a common criminal? Apparent success and honor in the eyes of society and multitudes can be a very fleeting thing. We must not seek it for its own sake nor trust in it when it appears we have it. God's people are never in general favor with the majority of people for long.

12:20-50 - Jesus Teaches When Greeks Seek Him

12:20-22 - Some Greeks seek to speak to Jesus

Among those who came to worship at the feast were Greeks. This word does not refer to Hellenists: Jews by nationality and religion who spoke Greek and accepted Greek culture because of where they lived (cf. Acts 6:1). Rather, this word refers to Greeks by nationality — people who are not Jewish. However, the record says that they were among those who came to worship at the feast; and since this was a Jewish feast, perhaps these were proselytes. Or perhaps they were Gentiles who had just heard about Jesus and had come to be present for the feast (though they could not fully participate in it).

Many of them may have come a long distance to the feast. Nevertheless, they had heard about Jesus, so they asked Philip for an opportunity to see Him. Philip told Andrew, and the two of them turn told Jesus.

Nothing more is said about these Greeks, but we presume that the discussion that follows occurred in their presence, so they heard the teaching Jesus gave.

12:23-26 - Jesus predicts His death, and urges others to follow Him

Jesus then began a discourse about His death. He said the hour of His glory was come. The Passover and His death were imminent. He knew He would die at the feast. Interestingly, He spoke of this as the time of His glory. In a sense, His death was glorious in that it provided salvation for all mankind. But more likely, He refers, not just to His death, but also to the resurrection and exaltation that would follow.

Jesus compared His death to a grain or seed of a plant that must fall in the ground and “die” in order to produce a new plant and more

fruit. The seed does not, of course, die in the sense of completely losing life, as plants do when they die. The seed changes form and sprouts to form new life. As the Creator, Jesus knew this. He simply spoke of a change of body, yet the life continues on. And this is the proper terminology to use as a comparison to His own death (and in a sense to our death). At death, we change bodies, but the life continues on like a seed changing form to a plant.

The point is that, in order for one to enter a new form or body, life in another form or body must be given up. But the result will be great benefit to others. The seed is just one seed by itself till it “dies” and sprouts to form a new plant. Then that plant will in turn create many more seeds like the one that produced it. This greatly multiplies the good results that come to all.

Jesus here describes the principle of sacrifice: one must be willing to give up what one has in order to accomplish something of greater value. The application to Jesus is obvious: by giving His life on the cross, He gave great benefit to all mankind. Like the seed, He sacrificed Himself in order to produce a much greater benefit to others. This result would also lead to His “glory.”

Jesus explains further that, if one loves this life to the point that he is determined to keep and use it for himself, he will lose his life in eternity. If one is willing, like the seed, to sacrifice the life one has, the result will be a much greater and more wonderful life in eternity. The principle also applies to us, in that those who serve Jesus must follow Him. As in Matt. 16:24-27, the point is that Jesus’ disciples must be willing to sacrifice our lives for Him as He sacrificed His life for us. He gave His life to die for us, but our sacrifice to Him is a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1,2) in which we give our lives serving Him according to His word (2 Cor. 5:14,15).

If we so serve Jesus, we too can give blessings and benefits to others. Then as Jesus was glorified, so the Father will honor us by allowing us to be where Jesus is. Where He will be in eternity, we will be there too, rejoicing in His presence and in the bliss of eternal life.

12:27-30 - Jesus calls on the Father to glorify His name, and the Father answers

Jesus realized that He would be glorified (v23), yet His soul was troubled. In some respects, He desired to ask His Father to save Him from that hour (the suffering and mental anguish of the cross). Yet, He knew that He had come to this hour for the purpose of enduring it.

In many ways, this section is similar to Jesus’ prayer in the garden (Matt. 26:36-46). The thoughts He expressed in the garden, and the anguish He endured there, were not new to Him. These verses show that the same thoughts had been in His mind for some time as He dreaded the death He must endure. As a man, He wanted to ask to avoid it; yet He knew it needed to be done. In the garden He did ask

that it be avoided if there were any possible way to do so, yet He still asked the Father's will to be done.

In His grief at this time, Jesus simply asked for the Father to glorify His name. The Father responded with a voice from heaven saying that He had glorified His name and would do so again.

This ought to be our request, when we don't know exactly what to pray for or what would be best to happen. Especially we should pray this when, like Jesus, we are facing a difficult trial that we wish we could avoid, but it may be important for us to endure the trial to accomplish God's will. We should simply pray that the events that take place will be whatever gives glory to God. We may not know what is best and may not wish to endure what is ahead. But if it will glorify God, we must be willing to submit and do His will.

The voice from heaven was variously interpreted or misinterpreted by the multitudes. Some thought it was just thunder from heaven, but others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. Jesus explained that the voice was not for His benefit but for that of the people. He already knew that God had been glorified by events on earth and would be so again (especially in His death and resurrection). But the multitudes needed (and we need) to know that God would be glorified.

Sometimes it seems the forces of evil are winning the battle here on earth, and we do not think God is being victorious. We get discouraged at the apparent success of sin and wickedness, as it spreads over the earth seemingly without any power to oppose it. This is surely the way the disciples would feel in the days ahead when Jesus was suffering and dying on the cross. Yet they would need to remember, even as we need to remember, that God has defeated evil before and will again. Especially He would defeat it at Jesus' death and resurrection.

Note that the opinions of the people, though involving some misunderstanding, yet show that they knew something had happened. Some tried to explain it away as thunder, just like some people today try to explain away Bible miracles. Others said an angel had spoken to Jesus, which shows they recognized the sound as involving speech. They misunderstood the source of the speech, yet they realized it was supernatural.

12:31-33 - Jesus promises that His death would result in men being drawn to Him

Jesus states that, in His death and resurrection, He would judge the world and would cast out the ruler of this world. Satan is called the ruler of the world here and in 14:30; 16:11. He is the one served by all people at some time in their lives and by most people most of the time. The world was about to join Satan is opposing Jesus by crucifying Him.

When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared that Satan and his followers had been victorious over Jesus; but in reality it was Satan himself who would be defeated. When Jesus arose again, Satan's defeat

was accomplished. Satan's primary powers in the world are sin and death. Both were defeated at the cross. From that point on, he has continued to tempt people into sin and death has continued, but it has been conclusively proved that Jesus' power is greater. Satan's final defeat is just a matter of time. See Heb. 2:9-15; John 16:11; 1 John 3:8; 4:4; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; 2 Tim. 1:10.

Jesus said that, if He were lifted up (by His death on the cross), He would draw all men to Himself. This indicated the manner of His death: He would be lifted above the earth as He was crucified on the cross. Doubtless, the people did not at the time understand this, but the meaning would become clear when His prediction came true.

Though Satan would cause Him to be put to death, yet this would not ultimately defeat Jesus. Instead, it would be the means by which He would draw men to Him. Satan doubtless thought that, by turning the multitudes against Jesus and bringing about His defeat, he would cause people to reject Jesus for all time. They would be repulsed by His manner of death and His inability to prevent it. However, by rising from the dead, Jesus gained the ultimate victory and achieved the means whereby people are attracted to Him, not driven from Him.

That death on the cross, which Satan intended to be a deathblow to Jesus and to His power for good, instead became the means of salvation to all men and the means that attracts men to Him! What a turn-about! Jesus "snatched victory from the jaws of defeat." That which was intended for His destruction became the very means He used to produce victory. Few events in history are characterized by such irony, and no other event can match the importance of this victory.

By His death, Jesus would draw "all peoples" to Himself: Jews and Gentiles. His intent from the beginning was to be, not a national king, but the Savior of people of all nations. He came to give hope of eternal life, not just to Jews, but also to Gentiles. To do this, He had to defeat Satan by crucifixion and resurrection.

Note that the drawing power that attracts men to Jesus is Jesus Himself, and especially the story of His death and resurrection as revealed in the gospel. Jesus draws men to Himself. Yet, He has commissioned us as His disciples to spread the message of what He has done by preaching the gospel. People are attracted to Jesus by hearing the message of His death and the importance of it.

This being true, it is foolish and sinful for men to try to use other means to attract people to the church, to Jesus, and to His teaching. It is totally contrary to Jesus' intent to try to attract people by offering them carnal attractions, such as banquets, candy, ice cream, recreation, entertainment, sports, parties, and other forms of fun and games. Nor does the Bible tell His church, as such, to help the world's poor and needy by offering food, clothing, shelter for the poor, and

care for the widows and orphans, etc., in order to attract people to Jesus.

There is nothing wrong with *individuals* having wholesome entertainment, and we are commanded to help the needy around us in the world. But this is not the work of the church, and churches should not institute such programs thinking they will lead people to salvation. Individuals should do good works for sake of the good works themselves, because Jesus commanded them. Our individual influence for good may encourage people to listen to what we say about Jesus. But the apostles never taught local churches to initiate such activities to attract people to Christ. Jesus even refused to give food when food was what people sought (see notes on John 6). Rather, the power that the early church used to save souls was the preaching of the gospel (Romans 1:16). We should do the same.

Likewise, it misses the point to try to attract people to the church by emphasizing the beauty of the meetinghouse or the skills of the preacher or even the friendliness of the people. Nothing should be used to attract people except the message of the gospel, the teachings of the Bible. The modern Social Gospel, with its carnal attractions, is a violation of the spiritual nature of the gospel, and shows that people lack faith in the power of the message of Jesus (John 6:44,45; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; Rom. 10:14-17; etc.).

For further discussion about the work of the church and the use of carnal attractions, see our article on church organization and work at our Bible Instruction web site at www.-gospelway.com/instruct/.

12:34-36 - The people think the Christ should remain forever, but Jesus again affirms that He will be with them just a little while

The people seemed to understand that Jesus was saying He would leave them. But this confused them, because they were convinced that the Christ should abide forever, according to the law. Yet Jesus was saying the Son of Man must be lifted up. So, they asked who this Son of Man was that He was referring to. When He had come to town, they had celebrated Him as the Messiah in the triumphal entry. They had supposed He would be their Messiah and reign on earth over an eternal kingdom. But how could He do that if He died? Was He talking about Himself or someone else that must be lifted up? In any case, it is clear that they misunderstood what He said.

Where did the law say that the Christ would abide forever? They gave no specific reference, but perhaps they had in mind such verses as Psa. 110:4; Isa. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 7:14. And truly, Jesus will abide forever and His kingdom will stand forever. But the problem these people had is they did not understand the nature of the kingdom. They thought it would be an earthly kingdom with civil earthly rule like Dav-

id had. How could the Christ do this, if He died? Note again that the people's misunderstanding of Christ is based on their determination that His kingdom must be an earthly kingdom like that of David (see notes on John 6:15).

However, when one understands that the kingdom is spiritual and pertains to man's relationship to God (John 18:36; Col. 1:13,14), then one understands that it was not contrary to God's plan nor to these prophecies for the Christ to die. On the contrary, it was necessary for Him to die in order to provide salvation and hope of eternal life in this spiritual kingdom. And this too had been prophesied in the Old Testament, but the people did not understand or accept these prophecies.

Why did Jesus not explain this to the people at this time? Probably because He had said this (or things related to it) in various forms so often that He knew they would not understand or believe (cf. 10:25; see chap. 6). Even His own disciples did not understand till after His death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus did not answer their question about the Son of Man directly. He simply repeated, in a different form, His affirmation that He would leave them. He returned to His illustration that He is the light who could give men understanding so they could see the way to travel (see notes on 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; 1 John 2:10).

But He repeated that the light would soon leave them. While they had the light, they should believe in it and walk in it so they could avoid darkness (sin, evil, spiritual confusion and error). To walk in darkness is to have no idea where one is going (spiritual error and confusion). But by believing in the light, one can be a son of light: a person characterized by light and the blessings associated it, just like a child shares the characteristics of his father. See also John 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; Luke 16:8; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5)

Jesus then withdrew from them a while. He was spending His nights outside the city. The time for final confrontation and His death drew near, but He had to die at the Passover as the Passover Lamb. So He taught all that He could, then left a while, accomplishing all He could, but making sure they did not kill Him till the appointed time.

12:37,38 - The people's disbelief fulfills Isaiah's prophecy

Despite all the signs Jesus had done, the people still did not believe on Him. This is interesting. They had just gotten through making a big production of His entry into Jerusalem, honoring Him and shouting great words of exaltation to Him (vv 12,13). Yet almost immediately afterward, we are told that they did not believe on Him. They did not really believe in what He said about Himself and did not believe He was who He said He was. They believed (or hoped) He might be the Messiah **they** wanted, doing things they way **they** wanted. But they did not believe He was the Messiah that He really was.

Note that again we are told the reason why they should have believed in Him: because of His miracles. That is the proof. They should have accepted He was from God despite their confusion over His teachings. They should have continued with Him until they did understand, and should have been willing to conform their ideas to His. Instead, they ignored the miracles, insisted on their own ideas, and rejected Him because He did not fit their ideas.

Yet, all this was prophesied. Despite their misunderstandings about the Messiah abiding forever, the Scriptures had really predicted the Messiah would be rejected. The specific quotation here is Isaiah 53:1 which, in question form, implies the people would not believe God's message despite the fact the arm (power and might) of the Lord had been revealed to them (in His works and miracles).

12:39,40 - They did not believe, because they closed their eyes

Another passage quoted from Isaiah 6:10 predicted that the people would not believe, because their eyes were blinded and their hearts hardened. See Matt. 13:13-15.

The different translations of the passage make it difficult to know who blinded and hardened the people. John's account says "He," Matthew says "they," and Isaiah just says "Make the heart of this people dull..." It appears unclear who does it. However, as with Pharaoh in Ex. chap 5-12, it can be viewed as both God and the people who produce the result. The people hardened and blinded themselves in that they are free moral agents and had the power to choose whether to listen to God or not. God did it in that His word is designed to attract those who have godly attitudes and open minds, but it is designed to repulse those who have ungodly attitudes and stubborn self-will.

Note that this is not teaching Calvinistic unconditional predestination. Matthew 13:13-15 clearly shows that the people were blinded because they closed their eyes. Whatever happened was conditional on their own free will and choice.

Johnson uses an excellent example. He explains that it is a matter of Divine law. It may be compared to a man who refuses to use his muscles; by natural law, he will become weak. So, if a person chooses to remain in the dark and refuses to come to the light, he will soon become blind. If this happens, who makes Him blind? It can be said that he did it, because he refused to allow light into his eyes. Or it can be said that God did it, because God made the law that led to the result. But even so, it happened only because the man chose to so act.

Likewise, God's Divine law decrees that a man who refuses to accept spiritual light will become spiritually blind (ignorant and without understanding). And a man who persists in disobeying God will become hardened in heart. So, when these people rejected the light and became blind, or when Pharaoh resisted God's law and became

hardened, who did it? The sinners did it because they chose to reject God and His laws. But it can also be said that God did it, because He made the laws that made it inevitable that such conduct would produce the end result. Yet, the law was conditioned on the choice of the people. Hence, it was not unconditional predestination but conditional predestination.

God had predicted all along that the people would reject His will and not accept the Messiah. This is nothing new or surprising. The same is true of people in any age who do not have the open mind and godly attitude to seek truth and change, if they find they have not been living in harmony with truth. Serving God takes humility to admit error and spiritual mindedness to seek God's will above all else in life, surely above our own desires. Those who do not have that attitude will not obey, and often will not even appear to understand the truth.

This passage is saying again what Jesus had often said about the people's unwillingness to believe in Him. The problem was not that the evidence for His claims was inadequate, as they implied it was. The problem was that the people did not have the right attitude toward truth and God's will.

12:41 - Isaiah made these statements when He saw the Lord's glory

Isaiah said these things (in Isa. 6:10) when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. John is clearly saying that "Him" in this passage refers to Jesus. Jesus is the one in Whom people did not believe (v37, and see v42 below). Hence, Jesus is the One whose glory Jesus saw in Isaiah 6 and the one He spoke of in Isaiah 6:10.

But Isaiah 6:10 is part of an overall context describing a vision in which Isaiah saw God on His throne (v1). Isaiah said, at the time, that He had seen Jehovah (6:5).

Hence, Isaiah said he saw Jehovah, but John cites that very event and said Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of Him. The necessary conclusion is that this is one of several passages in which Jesus is called Jehovah. And in this passage He was on His throne in glory. It is proper to use the term Jehovah for Jesus, as well as for God the Father.

12:42,43 - Some of the rulers did believe but refused to confess

Many people had not believed in Jesus (vv 37-41). But some did believe, including many even of the rulers. They would not confess Jesus, however, because they feared to be put out of the synagogue as the Pharisees had said would happen (see 9:22). Their refusal to confess Jesus because of this threat proved that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

We learn here that confession of Jesus was then, as it is today, a necessary requirement of discipleship. One must be willing to confess

Jesus in order to become a disciple, and one must be willing to continue to confess Him to remain a disciple. Those who, like these rulers, will not confess Jesus, cannot be His disciples. See also Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

We also learn that believing who Jesus is in ones heart is not enough to save a person or make him a disciple. Some today claim people are saved by “faith alone,” and all one needs to do to be saved is to have a conviction and trust in Jesus — obedience is not necessary, and especially baptism is not necessary. If so, then these rulers were saved. Yet, it is clear from the passages about confession that they were not saved, and most people will agree this is true (even of those who claim to believe in faith only).

It follows that people are not saved just by believing, but there are additional steps of obedience required. Confession is an outward work requiring physical action (speaking with the mouth — Rom. 10:9,10). Hence, outward acts of obedience are required to be saved.

If that is true, then why should anyone object to the fact that we conclude, based on many Scriptures, that baptism is also one of the acts required in order to receive forgiveness (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21)? By whatever reasoning one concludes that confession is essential to salvation and those who will not confess will not be saved, by the same kind of reasoning one can show that baptism is essential and those who will not be Scripturally baptized will not be saved.

For further discussion about obedience, baptism, and salvation by faith only vs. obedient faith, see our article on these subjects at our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

This passage also shows that, when Jesus tells us what to do but we refuse to do it because we want to please people, then we are guilty of loving the praise of men more than the praise of God. This is a common problem that keeps people from being disciples of Jesus. Many people are too concerned what people think of them and too little concerned what Jesus and God the Father think of them. This was a common problem with the Pharisees who sought the praises of men (Matt. 6:1-18; 23:1-12; John 5:41,44). Religious leaders today are tempted to the same problem, and all of us need to guard against it. Nothing should be allowed to be as important to us as pleasing God (John 7:18; 2 Cor. 10:12).

12:44-46 - Faith in God requires faith in Jesus

These verses record one of Jesus' last public discourses to the Jews, perhaps His very last before His arrest and crucifixion. It is not clear exactly when He spoke these words, but the account draws very close to the time of His death.

Jesus in a sense summarized His whole teaching appeal to the Jews in these verses. He claimed again that He was acting as an official representative of His Father who had sent Him. So, those who believed in Him were actually believing in the Father who sent Him, and those who saw Him were seeing the Father who sent Him. This is not a physical truth and does not prove He and His Father were the same person (see on 8:16-18; 10:30,38). He is simply expressing the fact that He was acting as His Father's representative.

It follows that, if they rejected His teaching they were also rejecting the teaching of His Father. One cannot really believe in the Father, if He refuses to believe in Jesus (and vice-versa). And the same principle applies to our attitude toward those official representatives through whom Jesus revealed His word in the gospel or New Testament. How we receive or reject them is how we are receiving or rejecting Jesus. See also Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20.

Jesus also repeated again that He was the light of the world so that people who believed in Him would not live in darkness (see notes on 12:35,36).

12:47 - Jesus came to save the world, not to judge it

Jesus said again that He was not here to judge those who rejected His word. He was here to save the world, not judge it (see also 3:17; 8:15). Again, this did not mean He would never judge the world. On the contrary, some day He will return to judge the world (see v48). But that was not the purpose of His first coming.

The world is condemned, but not primarily because Jesus came and people did not believe. The world is condemned because of sin: disobedience to God's commands. But the only hope of salvation is through faith in Christ. So Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it: it was already condemned. Yet, if people do not believe, they will stand condemned because they have refused the only remedy for their sins.

Nothing here teaches it is wrong for us to rebuke sin (see notes on 7:24; etc.). Jesus repeatedly rebuked sin while on earth. But final judgment and statement of eternal destinies will be left till He returns (Matt. 25:36ff; 2 Cor. 5:10); that is where we too must leave it.

12:48-50 - Judgment will be based on Jesus' commands, which He spoke on His Father's authority

Jesus will come again at the last day. At that time, the world will be judged according to what Jesus has taught. Though Jesus did not judge people while here on earth in His first coming, this did not mean people could lightly reject or ignore His teaching. They would still be judged by His words at the last day. This affirms that there will be a judgment at the last day, as also taught in Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 2:4- 11; 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians

5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15.

Further, at that time we will be judged by what Jesus has taught. This is why it is so important for us to study Jesus' teaching. Does it make sense to face judgment and be sentenced to eternal destiny when we have not even examined the standard of judgment to see whether or not we measure up? A student cannot pass a test without studying the material the test will cover, and we cannot be acceptable in judgment unless we have studied the Bible (John 8:32; Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Psalms 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:6).

But note further that, simply because people refuse to obey Jesus, that does not prove they are not amenable or subject to His law. All men are subject to His law, because He is Lord of all, King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. And His teaching is the same as that of the Father, who likewise rules over all. It simply is not true, as some teach, that only citizens in Jesus' kingdom are subject to His laws. Not all have the blessings and privileges of citizenship; but all are subject to His laws and will be judged if they refuse to obey. He Himself so states here.

We must realize that, if we reject Jesus' teaching, we are rejecting the teaching of the Father since Jesus spoke what the Father told Him to speak. This is not denying that Jesus Himself possessed the authority of Deity. But on earth He was acting as a man subject to God the Father like we are. We cannot speak on our own authority apart from God, and neither did Jesus. Of course, His thoughts and desires never contradicted those of the Father anyway, so whatever He taught would agree with the Father's will (17:20,21).

The Father's commands lead to eternal life. We must accept and follow them if we seek eternal life. If we reject what Jesus said, we reject what the Father said, and that in turn is rejecting eternal life. We need, therefore, to believe and obey His teaching if we want the eternal life that only God can give us.

Jesus' Final Days – Chap 13-21

The first twelve chapters of John's record have discussed the major portion of Jesus' public ministry. The last nine discuss His final days on earth, from shortly before the crucifixion till after the resurrection.

John 13

13:1-30 - The Passover Meal and the Washing of Feet

13:1 - Jesus meets with the disciples for the Passover

The events recorded here occurred while Jesus was with His disciples to eat the Passover feast. Other writers record this Passover meal (Matthew 26:20-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-30). However, John skips several events that are recorded by the other authors, and the others skip many events that John recorded.

In particular, other accounts tell us that Jesus kept this Passover with the twelve in a place that He had especially directed His disciples to prepare. Further, it was at this feast that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. This means that John's account has progressed to the very night before Jesus' death. The remainder of John's account will concern the events immediately preceding, during, and following Jesus' death. It is helpful, while studying John's account, to keep in mind what the others wrote.

The Passover was a Jewish feast commemorating Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage. On that occasion, God went through Egypt slaying the firstborn sons of all the Egyptians, but sparing the firstborn of Israel. To be spared, the Israelites had to mark their houses with the blood of a lamb.

The lamb was slain on the 14th day of the first month. This was followed by a feast of seven days of unleavened bread, which lasted from the 14th day "at even" till the 20th day, inclusive. See Exodus 11:4-12:28; 12:43-51; 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:4-8; Numbers 9:1-14; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Exodus 34:25; Numbers 28:16-25; 33:1-4; Joshua 5:10,11; 2 Kings 23:21-23; etc.

Jesus had said He would be crucified at the Passover. This shows the symbolic connection between Jesus and the lamb that died so the people could be spared. See 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Here John tells us that Jesus knew what was about to happen. He knew He would die, yet He went ahead with the events that He knew would lead to that conclusion. This proves that He loved His own until the end. He was willing to die because He knew it was the only way people could be saved. "His own" were His disciples, His sheep who would hear His voice. It was because He knew there were such people who would be receptive to His message and receive His salvation that He was willing to die.

Note: There exists considerable confusion as to exactly what night it was that Jesus ate the Passover. Specifically, it is difficult to know, comparing John's accounts to the other accounts, whether or not the night on which Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover was the same night that others ate it. And if He ate on a different night from others, by what authority did He do so. Suffice it to say that Jesus never committed any sin, therefore He did not disobey the Passover law, and there are explanations that harmonize His act here with the law. However, rather than spending time on the subject, I suggest interested readers consult King's commentary on John, which contains a careful analysis of possible explanations.

13:2,3 - Jesus acted with full knowledge of what was about to happen

At this point, the devil had already led Judas Iscariot to decide to betray Jesus. Other passages tell us, of course, that he did this to receive 30 pieces of silver. As discussed in 12:4-6 (see notes there) Judas was already a thief, so covetousness and love of money motivated him to commit other evils as well. His betrayal of Jesus was not his first act of covetousness or greed. He had already established that pattern in his life, and simply continued that pattern here. In fact, this event happened soon after Jesus had corrected Judas for his criticism of Mary's use of valuable perfume to anoint Jesus. It may be that he was still reacting to that event when he determined to betray Jesus. Cf. vv 21-30; see notes on Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10,11; Luke 22:3-6.

Jesus knew what was happening (v1). He knew what Judas had determined to do, and He knew that He had come from God and was going back to God. All things were given into His hands. Perhaps this is stated because it shows that Jesus was Divine and knew His power. Yet, with all this exaltation, He was willing to humble Himself to perform the menial task John is about to describe. It would be especially difficult for Him to wash the feet of Judas, fully knowing what Judas had already determined to do. Yet, Jesus' love and humility was so deep that He washed even the feet of His own betrayer.

Note: Again there is a textual issue as to whether the original language says the events recorded here occurred after supper was over, or whether they occurred as supper was in progress. This difference is reflected in the various translations, and apparently depends on a variation of just one letter in the original. The context appears to indicate that the meal was still in progress as these events occurred.

13:4,5 - Jesus washes the feet of the disciples

Jesus arose from the table, laid aside His garments (the outer ones) took a towel, girded Himself, poured water in a basin, and began to wash and dry the disciples' feet.

Washing feet was an act of hospitality in that land where people generally traveled by foot, wearing sandals, walking in hot, dusty sand. Washing the feet of visitors was done to comfort guests, meet their needs, and welcome them. It was often done by servants and was considered a menial task. See Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Exodus 30:19-21; Judges 19:21; 1 Sam. 25:41; 2 Sam. 11:8; Song of Solomon 5:3; Luke 7:38,44; 1 Tim. 5:10.

Other accounts show that this occasion was one of several on which the apostles had been arguing among themselves about which of them was greatest and would have the highest positions in the kingdom. This was an issue they had fussed about among themselves more than once. They had a serious problem with pride and self-exaltation. Note the parallel account in Luke 22:14-27; see also Mark 9:33-36; 10:35-45; Luke 9:46-48; Matthew 20:20-28.

Most likely, their pride had been stimulated by the great honor the people showed when they entered the city with the Lord. Like other people, they expected the time was at hand for Jesus to announce His kingdom and attempt to begin His earthly reign. This lifted the apostles up with pride, since they were part of the inner circle. No doubt this encouraged the strife among them, recorded by Luke, as to who would be the greatest in that kingdom. Apparently no one wanted, at such a time, to do any such menial task as might lead anyone to think they should have any but the highest of positions. One wonders whether or not it was even already on their minds – maybe even part of their dispute – as to who would do the task of washing their feet after their journey.

On such occasions in the past, Jesus had tried to teach the apostles humility, even explaining that He Himself had come to serve and give His life for others. He was not here to lord it over others (Matthew 20:28). Finally, on this occasion He determined to do an act of service that would demonstrate to His apostles the need for humility. Cf. Philippians 2:1-8.

By washing the disciples' feet, Jesus took upon Himself the humblest of duties, generally left to a servant. It would appear that, up till this time, the feet had not been washed (else why would He wash

them again?). This would indicate that none of the other disciples would lower himself to do it for the others. Jesus had perhaps waited to see if any would condescend to do the work. When none did so, He did it Himself. Hence, the One, Whom they all knew to be the greatest among them, voluntarily chose to do the humblest task among them. This is exactly what He had taught them in words on other occasions (see the passages above).

13:6,7 - Peter questions Jesus for washing his feet

While doing this task, Jesus came to Peter to wash his feet. Peter, outspoken as ever, expressed what the others were no doubt wondering. He questioned why the Lord would wash his feet. Jesus stated that Peter did not understand at that time, but would understand later.

This shows there was more to Jesus' act than simply washing feet. If washing feet had been the main point of what Jesus' did, then Peter already understood that much. Obviously there was something deeper intended by Jesus' act. Peter's objection proved that he did not understand this deeper meaning.

13:8 - Peter then objects to allowing Jesus to wash his feet

Having first questioned the Lord's act, Peter then openly objected to Jesus' washing his feet. This indicates the attitude Peter had, which was no doubt shared by the others. The task was too humble for Jesus to do for the disciples. They had not humbled themselves to do it for one another, but Peter's concept of rank among them was such that surely Jesus was not the one to do it! To him, this was a task for the lowliest to do. No one else would do it, so it was better to leave it undone than to have Jesus do it. Jesus was the highest in rank and surely should not do it.

Doubtless, this very attitude is what kept all the disciples from doing the act to begin with. And this is the attitude Jesus was trying to correct. He wanted them to learn that people are not relieved from the responsibility to do works of humble service for others simply because they possess authority and deserve glory. On the contrary, the one who serves others is the one most deserving of glory.

Jesus responded that, if Peter did not let Jesus wash his feet, then Peter would have no part of Jesus — i.e., no relationship with Him. If Peter wanted to continue to be a disciple of Jesus and serve Him, then He had to submit to this act.

This appears to mean that Jesus had a lesson to teach the apostles. If they refused to let Him teach it, they were refusing to follow Him as the teacher. Jesus was determined to teach humility to these proud men. If they refused to submit - especially if their refusal was based on the kind of motive Peter had - they were just continuing the wrong attitude Jesus was trying to correct. Hence, He insisted they let Him proceed so He could teach the lesson.

13:9-11 - Peter then asks for even greater cleansing

Impetuous Peter then went to the other extreme. If Jesus needed to do this in order for Peter to be His disciple, then let Jesus wash even more of Him: his hands and head as well as his feet! Peter was determined (in his mind) to be a total disciple, so let Jesus wash everything!

But Peter's approach would have missed the point and defeated Jesus' purpose. Perhaps Peter was even intentionally extending the act so it would not be so entirely a menial matter: Don't just do the unpleasant things, Lord, but go further and do what is less objectionable. But such an approach would defeat Jesus' intent to demonstrate humility and to make them ashamed of their own lack of humility by compelling them to submit to His humility.

Jesus responded that Peter did not need his hands and head washed. He was already clean (bathed), so all that needed washing were his feet and then he would be clean entirely. It was a matter of what "needs" washing. This shows that their feet did need washing. Jesus was not doing this just as an outward show but to meet a real need. What did not need washing, He would not wash. He washed their feet because they needed it.

Jesus used the opportunity, however, to say they were not entirely clean, meaning that among them was Judas who was evil and would betray Jesus. This was meant spiritually, not physically as the rest of the discussion meant.

13:12-17 - Jesus then urges the disciples to follow His example

Having completed His task, Jesus asked whether or not they understood what He had done. This shows that there was more to this than just washing of feet. Of course, they knew He had done that. But He sought to emphasize a deeper lesson they should learn.

He reminded them that He was the teacher and the Master. The servant is not greater than the Master. So, if the Master washed their feet, they should wash one another's feet. He had given them an example, so now He expected them to follow it. They would be blessed only if they practiced what He had exemplified.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is here giving His apostles an example He wanted them to imitate. This is clearly and repeatedly stated. The question is what is the meaning of the example, and what is the proper application of it today?

There are two possible views to be considered: (1) Jesus is here instituting a ritual of washing feet to be practiced regularly in the public worship assembly of the church, as He did on this same occasion with regard to the Lord's Supper. (2) Jesus is teaching the value of humility, kindness, and service — that we should be willing to render for others

any service that they truly need, no matter how humble. The washing of feet was just a particular occasion to illustrate that principle.

Jesus did NOT intend to institute a ritual as practiced in church assemblies, like the Lord's Supper.

This is clear for the following reasons:

(1) John 13 nowhere states this is to be a ritual of worship done in the assemblies of the church.

(2) No other passage gives any example or any indication that Christians did this in church worship assemblies.

(3) The only passage after this that ever even mentions feet washing is 1 Timothy 5:10. The context there shows that the act is a personal, individual act done as one has the opportunity, like other qualities listed in that context. There is surely no indication of church assemblies. The widow indeed is hospitable to **strangers** and washes feet of the **saints**.

(4) No passage anywhere states when or how often this ritual should be practiced or what purpose it would serve.

It is true that Jesus at this time instituted the Lord's Supper. But we have other Scriptures that clarify that Christians practiced the Lord's Supper in their worship assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:17ff). The time and frequency when it should be done are also taught (Acts 20:7). The **meaning** and purpose of the Lord's Supper is also clearly stated several times. We have absolutely no such instruction or information regarding feet washing as a ritual.

So as a religious rite, we have instructions to take the Lord's Supper in the church worship assembly, we are told its purpose and when to do it. Regarding feet washing as a religious rite, however, we have no instruction to do it in the church assembly, we are never told what purpose any such act might serve, nor are we told when or how often to do it. When the Lord instituted a religious rite, He always gave us the necessary information to carry it out.

(5) Many other passages in the Old and New Testaments mention washing of feet, and in none of them is there any evidence the practice was to be a religious worship ritual done in the assemblies of God's people. In every case, the practice was simply an act of kindness and hospitality done by individuals in a private way to meet the needs of people (see references listed above).

(6) When modern denominations attempt to practice "foot-washing," that which they do is surely not what these passages describe. Generally in such denominations, each person has only **one** foot washed, where Jesus clearly washed the **feet** (plural) of each disciple (vv 6-10).

Further, in denominations people know ahead of time their feet will be washed, so they make sure they are clean (who wants everybody in a church assembly seeing and smelling your dirty feet?). But this de-

feats the whole purpose of the washing — to meet a need as an act of hospitality. Jesus clearly said that what was already clean did not “need” to be washed. The feet washed in ritual ceremonies today are clean; therefore, by Jesus’ own statement they need not be washed. His act was intended to meet a “need.” Modern denominational ritual foot washing involves just the opposite: Feet are washed that do not need to be washed.

Jesus washed feet (plural) because if a man had one foot dirty, the other would be too. Denominations wash only one foot, because it is only a ritual: people don’t need both feet washed. But the same reasoning that leads them to not wash the foot they leave unwashed would likewise tell them to not wash either foot. Neither foot really needs to be washed, so as Jesus explained, there is no purpose in washing either one!

Further, the main lesson Jesus was trying to teach His apostles was humility. But the modern denominational ritual eliminates the whole element of humility: one makes great show and pomp of his humility! One who is truly humble does not seek or deliberately set up rituals by which he can demonstrate his humility!

So the modern denominational ritual violates both aspects of what the Lord intended: It is not really an act of humility, and it does not really meet a need. It is nothing like what the Lord really did.

(7) The fact Jesus said more than once that the disciples did not understand what He was doing, indicates that simply washing feet was not the real point of the lesson — they could clearly see He was doing that (note John 13:7,12).

What then was the lesson Jesus intended to teach?

Perhaps there is even more to it than this, but at least this much seems to be involved: The 12 had disputed among themselves about which of them would have the greatest place of honor in Jesus’ kingdom (see notes above). Jesus’ act showed that what is important is **service**, not **authority** or greatness in man’s ways of looking at greatness. (Cf. Matthew 20:20-28.)

The disciples needed a lesson on having the **humility** to **serve** one another with **kindness**, rather than competing with one another to see who can excel others in honor and power. The 12 refused to humble themselves to serve the others in this way. So, Jesus took the opportunity to serve them and thereby teach them the lesson of **humble service** to meet the needs of others, rather than striving to excel in honor and power. If the **Lord** performed this kind of humble service, surely the **disciples** should do the same. To make this a ritual in the church assembly misses the point.

Compare this to Luke 10:37 in which Jesus had plainly described a specific act of kindness done by a man (the Samaritan), and He then commands others to “go and do likewise” — just like in John 13. Yet we

know He wasn't saying to do just or even primarily the specific thing the man did (help someone beaten by robbers), but rather to show care and kindness to help people in whatever their need.

The application to today would be that anytime others really need our help, we should be kind enough to be willing to serve in whatever capacity they need, no matter how humble, not thinking we are too good to do certain tasks. In certain cases, people today may need their feet washed (such as elderly people, sick people, or children who cannot bathe themselves, etc.), though this would be much less common in our society than in theirs. But there are plenty of other opportunities to serve, and we should be humble enough to do so.

13:18-20 - Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal

Jesus then returned, it seems, to His reference to Judas as His betrayer. He had said that the disciples would be happy in doing as Jesus taught them (v17), but He knew they would not all be happy in it. One of them whom He had chosen was Judas, who would betray Jesus and then end his own life. This would fulfill the passage of one who would turn against the very one he ate bread with (Psalm 41:9).

Jesus had chosen Judas, not to salvation, but to be an apostle. But He knew what kind of man Judas was. Judas was wicked already (see notes on v2). Jesus nevertheless had chosen Him, knowing the result would fulfill Scripture. Judas did not sin in order to fulfill Scripture, nor did God compel him to so act. But knowing that Judas would be a betrayer, God had predicted it ahead of time.

He warned them of this ahead of time so they could understand and believe when it was fulfilled. It seems that this was true of a number of things Jesus said. He knew they would not understand what He said at the time He spoke it. And when He died there would be great temptation to them to think that He had been a failure or not the Messiah whom they thought. But if He told them ahead of time what to expect, even though they did not understand at the time He said it, yet when the event later occurred they would realize what He meant and that He had anticipated these events all along. This would strengthen their faith in Him and their conviction that what had happened was not a failure but had been God's will.

Then He assured them that whoever received those whom He sent would receive Him, and whoever received Him would receive the One who sent Him (see Luke 10:16; Matthew 10:40). After the fulfillment of those things Jesus had been describing, He had a work for them to do. In that work, they would be received by some people and not by others. He wanted them to know that the treatment they received for doing His work was the same treatment being given to Jesus and His Father (as far as they were concerned).

13:21,22 - Jesus then more specifically predicts the betrayal

This was the night before Jesus' death and shortly before He was betrayed and arrested. He was obviously quite distressed over the suffering He would endure (as He later expressed more fully in the garden). He had already referred to the fact they were not all clean and one of them would turn against Him (vv 2,18). As He continued His deep sorrow over this, He determined to tell them more specifically what would happen. This prediction is also recorded in other accounts in Matthew 26:21ff; Mark 14:18ff; Luke 22:21ff.

He said very definitely that one of them would betray Him. It is bad enough to sin against your Master, to be unfaithful in fulfilling your duties to Him. But to betray Him is to take sides with His enemies and, worse yet, to make use of your special position as a disciple to enable you to aid the enemy in defeating your master. There are few things more hated and despised than the act of betraying one's own cause, but how much greater when one betrays the very Son of God. Yet Jesus was saying one of them would betray Him.

The disciples in fact would all fail Him before the night was over, but none of them (except Judas) expected to do such a thing. They all considered themselves to be true to Him. They no doubt loved Him, though they deeply misunderstood much of His intent. But to think that one of them would betray Him was no doubt a severe blow to them.

Other accounts show that Judas had already made the necessary arrangements to deliver Jesus to His enemies for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus knew He had to die, but He said that the one who betrayed Him would have been better off had he not been born.

Other accounts say the disciples began each one to ask if he was the one to do this terrible thing. Jesus said it was one of them who ate from the very dish He was eating from. When Judas asked if he was the one, Jesus gave an affirmative that showed He knew who it was. Apparently, however, Judas asked this question and received the answer privately, since John later records that the other disciples did not understand Judas was the one.

Again, the fact God knew who would do this does not mean that He compelled that person or predestined him to do it. God knew from the beginning how the Jews would treat Jesus and how Judas would act. These men were already evil men long before the betrayal and crucifixion. This was their choice, resulting from the influence of Satan (Luke 22:3). But knowing the kind of people they were, God dealt with them in such a way that their evil character led them to do what God foreknew would happen. Evil men, when treated with love and goodness, will often react with evil and malice. Such was the case here. Jesus had done nothing but good to Judas, yet Judas turned against him.

13:23-26 - John asks Jesus who the betrayer might be

John no doubt here refers to himself as the one whom Jesus' loved (see our introduction to the book). He was leaning on Jesus' bosom. Presumably, they reclined at the table (rather than sitting in chairs as we do), each lying on his side with his head at the table and his feet away from it. In this way, John was very close to Jesus and leaning back could even lean against Him. Peter made a motion to him to ask Jesus who it was that would betray Him.

When John asked, Jesus said it was the one to whom He was about to give a sop - piece of bread of meat that had been dipped in a broth or sauce. Then He gave it to Judas. Apparently, this too was done quietly (John was so close this would be easy to do), for John proceeds to say that no one else knew what Judas was going to do.

John, as the author of this account, however, is able to here give his personal testimony that Jesus knew beforehand who it was that would betray Him.

13:27-30 - Judas then leaves the meeting

Satan then entered into Judas and Jesus told him to do quickly the thing he intended to do. Satan had already influenced Judas to bargain with the rulers to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14). John's statement here appears to mean that, at this time, Judas became fully set in his heart to go through with it. Perhaps the fact that he realized Jesus knew his intent also provoked Judas to proceed to give in to Satan and accomplish the betrayal before Jesus could do something to prevent it.

Note that, when men do evil (including when Judas did evil) it is because they give in to the influence of Satan, not because God compels men to do evil or predestines them to do so. Judas acted as he did because he gave in to the influence of Satan, not of God. But Judas had the power to allow Satan into his life or not. If he gave it to Satan, it was by his own evil choice.

Jesus told him to do it quickly. Perhaps this is similar to our expression of "get it over with." Sometimes people are determined to do something we object to; but if they are determined to do it, it is better to be done with it. Jesus is not justifying or condoning the act, let alone encouraging it. It was a shame it had to be done; but if Judas was going to do it, it was better to have it over with than to continue the waiting. Jesus also knew the act was necessary for the salvation of the world, and He knew it had to be done at the Passover, so He told Judas to get on with it.

John said no one knew why Jesus had said this. Presumably, this means no one except John. Though perhaps John means that, though he now understood that Jesus was betray Jesus, yet he did not understand that Jesus here was telling Judas to proceed immediately with

the betrayal. He may have thought the betrayal would happen at some future time.

The others thought perhaps Judas was being told to take some of the money from the bag and buy something for the feast or give something to the poor. In any case, Judas left.

It was already night, so the next several chapters in John's account, up till the day of His death, all occurred on the night before He was slain. John gives us far more information than do the other writers about the things Jesus said on that final night.

13:31-16:33 - Jesus' Final Discourse to the Apostles

13:31-33 - Jesus predicts that He is about to leave the disciples

Knowing He was about to die, Jesus gave final instructions to the eleven. He discussed topics relating to His death, its effects, and teachings to prepare the apostles for things to come. These instructions were given after Judas had left (v30).

He began by plainly telling them that He was going to be with them only a little while longer. He would leave and they would seek for Him. But as He had told the Jews, they could not go where He was going (see notes on 7:33,34; see also below on 13:36ff).

He spoke of this as a time of His glory. He would be glorified and would glorify God. God would in turn glorify Him, because He had glorified God.

This would be a very difficult concept to understand, no doubt, if Jesus faced simply a normal death. However, this was no ordinary death. Jesus would be the sinless Son of God, dying as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. And following His death, He would be raised from the dead and eventually ascend to the right hand of the Father.

The glory was not in the manner of the death, but in the effects it would produce. Jesus' glory in heaven and His glory in the eyes of men came after the death was accomplished. The death itself was a horrible torment, that Jesus dreaded and was ashamed to have to face (see also Hebrews 12:2,3; Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 1:18-21).

Note that Jesus here called the disciples "little children," a term expressing His love and care for them. This may help us understand the reference to Jesus as the "eternal Father" in Isaiah 9:6.

13:34,35 - Jesus left a new commandment for His disciples

Preparing to leave the disciples, Jesus wanted them to understand the proper attitude they should have for one another. He gave them a new commandment: They should love one another as Jesus loved

them. God has always commanded His people to love one another. The command was new in that it is based on Jesus' example of love.

Jesus had just washed their feet to show them His humble willingness to serve their good. He had done this because they lacked love for one another but were instead filled with pride, arguing about who would be the greatest.

However, Jesus had shown them love throughout His lifetime. And yet the love He referred to here is more than just the love during His lifetime. Also included was the love He was about to show in dying for them. He would soon say that this is the greatest kind of love (15:13).

Love is a sincere concern for the well being of others. Love for others is commanded in many passages (Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13). Love for our fellow-disciples or other Christians is especially commanded (John 15:12-17; Ephesians 4:2,31-5:2; Philippians 2:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9,10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8,9; 4:8; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-18,23; 4:8-5:3).

The world plays lip service to love, yet perverts the concept and often even uses it to justify evil and gross perversions. The kind of love Jesus is talking about is expressed by obedience to His commands (John 14:15,21-24,31; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 10:24; 1 John 2:3-6,15-17; 5:2,3; 2 John 5,6; Revelation 3:19). Strangely, many people think they are showing love even as they disobey His commands. Such is the very opposite of the love Jesus is here commanding.

Jesus further said that practicing this love would indicate to the world that we are His disciples. This follows because a disciple is one who imitates his Lord and strives to be like Him. Jesus is here saying we especially should imitate His love. Again, love requires obedience to His commands, so this does not mean we are His disciples if we just have some close or deep feeling for one another. Love must show itself in treating one another as Jesus' word commands.

Yet strangely many people claim to be part of Jesus' church and think they are His disciples simply because they have strict concepts of how to worship God and how the church should be organized and function. This is definitely part of loving Jesus and our brethren. But some make demands in these areas that Jesus Himself never made and others show little regard for the needs of their brethren, treating them like they are dirt when they hold other viewpoints. Such does not prove they are Jesus' disciples but just the opposite.

True love requires both doctrinal soundness and a sincere concern for how we treat one another. Anything less is not the love Jesus showed for us, is not the love He commanded here, and surely does not prove we are His disciples.

13:36-38 - Jesus predicts Peter's denial

Jesus had said the disciples could not follow Him where He was going. Peter asked where Jesus was going. Jesus said, though they could not follow Him at that time, they would follow Him later. Clearly, He is describing death and going to be with the Father in eternity (see 7:33-36; 14:2,12,28; 16:5,7,10,16,17,28; 13:1,3; 17:11,13; 20:17). The disciples would go there, not immediately, but eventually. The point is that Jesus was leaving and the result would be a very difficult time for the disciples. Perhaps He is also referring to the manner of His death: He would die as an act of supreme sacrifice for the truth and for the salvation of others. None of the disciples could die in that sense, but they could and would eventually die as martyrs for the cause of truth.

Peter asked why He could not follow. He said He was willing even to die for Jesus. Apparently, he thought Jesus was saying that the disciples lacked courage or commitment to follow Him. Obviously, he did not understand the nature of Jesus' mission and where Jesus was going.

As recorded in other accounts, Peter boldly declared that, no matter how many other people stumbled over Jesus, nothing would ever make him stumble. He said he would even die for Jesus (Matthew 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31; Luke 22:33,34).

These are bold words, but much easier said than done. 1 Corinthians 10:12 — Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Many make bold professions of what they would do in God's service. We are convinced we will do what is right and not fall into error. Yet, when the time of temptation comes, it is not nearly as easy as it was to talk about it.

Jesus plainly predicted that Peter would betray Him three times that very night. He did not just say Peter would stumble, but that in fact He would deny Him, and not just once, but three times, and not just sometime, but that very night before the cock crowed. It was a very explicit and powerful prophecy, and was precisely fulfilled (see Matthew 26:69ff; Mark 14:66ff; Luke 22:55ff). Such ability to predict the future is another proof that Jesus was a true prophet of God.

But let us learn some lessons from Peter. His error is now obvious to us, but it would not have been at the time. There was truth in his statements. He would have fought to the death for Jesus, and he attempted to do so — John 18:10. The problem came when he did not understand what Jesus was doing. When he saw Jesus surrender without a fight, Peter apparently lost faith.

This shows us the importance of understanding truth. Courage and boldness are needed. But if we don't understand what God expects, we will lose heart and sin in time of hardship.

In contrasting Matthew 26:34; John 13:38; Luke 22:31-34 to Mark 14:20, we see that Matthew's account predicts three denials "before the

cock crows,” but Mark has “before the cock crows twice.” This difference in prophecy is paralleled in the accounts of the fulfillment (cf. Matthew 26:74,75 to Mark 14:68,72; Luke 22:60,61; John 18:27).

There is no contradiction. The cocks crow twice in the night, around midnight and then again around morning. The midnight one had no particular significance so people ignored it. The morning crowing signaled the beginning of day, it had significance to people, so it is “the cock crowing” — i.e., the important one (cf. Mark 13:35). John and Matthew spoke only of the morning one, while Mark recorded both.

John 14

Chap. 14 continues Jesus' final instructions and guidance to His apostles before His arrest and crucifixion. This section began in 13:31 and continues through chap. 16.

14:1 - Jesus offers comfort to His disciples through faith

Jesus had told His disciples that He must leave them and go to the Father, but the disciples could not go with Him (13:33). This obviously bothered Peter because He really wanted to go with Jesus (13:36-38). What is more, Jesus knew that the apostles were about to face troubles far greater than anything they understood at that point. He had just predicted that one of them would betray Him. He had repeatedly told them that He was going to die. These events would cause great distress and disillusionment to the disciples. He had just told Peter that he would deny Jesus. He elsewhere predicted that all the disciples would forsake Him and flee. Difficult times were ahead, not just for Him, but also for them.

So, Jesus offered to calm the trouble or distress the disciples would face by calling them to trust or believe in Him just as they did in God. He had earlier told them that He and His Father were one (10:30), and to believe in Him is to believe in the Father (12:44) because the Father sent Him. Some people want to view believing in Jesus as something different from believing in the Father, but you can't really do one without the other. The Father and Son are united in will and nature. They confirm one another's claims. It is impossible, therefore, to truly believe in one while rejecting the other.

If we have faith in God, it will cause us to have faith in Jesus. If we have faith in Jesus, we will not be greatly troubled by what He does, even when we do not understand why He does it. We will have confidence that He is acting in our best interest and the result will be for our good, even when we cannot see how it can be so. This is the faith Jesus was asking the disciples to have in Him despite the fact He had told them He was leaving.

14:2,3 - Jesus promises the disciples a place in the mansions He prepares

Jesus then explained one reason why He had to go: to prepare a place for the disciples in the Father's house. There are many "mansions" there. "Mansion" (μονη) is a "dwelling place" (NASB). Vine adds, "primarily a staying, abiding, (akin to μνω to abide), denotes an abode" (cf. to John 14:23).

Just as surely as Jesus went, just that surely He would return to receive them that they might be with Him (they would “follow after” when He returned to receive them — 13:36). The disciples will be with Him where He is in His Father’s house. Cf. John 12:26; 17:24; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:17.

Jesus had repeatedly said He was going to the Father. It is natural to conclude that He here means He was going to Heaven and would prepare a dwelling place there for the disciples. We cannot go there now, but would follow after death and the judgment (see 13:36). Hence, the reference is to our eternal reward.

Another view, however, is that the Father’s house is the church or kingdom (1 Tim. 3:15). Jesus was going to receive it, but the apostles could not follow Him into it (13:36) until it had been set up. They would follow later. Jesus would go to “prepare this place” when He died and would come again after His resurrection (which is the foundation fact of the gospel and the church). See also Matt. 18:20; John 14:23; 1 John 4:15. In what sense He had to “prepare” this place is no more speculative than the sense in which He would need to prepare Heaven. Jesus is the way (v6) to the Father in the church as well as in Heaven. Such a view does no violence, so far as I can tell to the overall teaching of Scripture.

However, it seems throughout this context and repeatedly in John that Jesus refers to the fact He is going back to heaven to dwell with the Father. He would die and then ascend to the Father (Acts 1:11). He is there now in God’s presence, seated on God’s right hand (Acts 2:23). He will remain there till the end of time when He comes to raise all men from the dead, judge them, and then His chosen ones will personally go with Him to Heaven to be in the Father’s eternal home (Matt. 25:31ff; 1 Thess. 4:13ff).

The context throughout the next few chapters also shows that, after He was gone, Jesus would provide certain things including the Holy Spirit. But these things occurred after He ascended to the Father in heaven (Acts 2). That would seem to indicate that Jesus would go to prepare a place in the Father’s mansion after His ascension. Then, He would “come again” to receive us to Himself at the judgment day. If the mansions refer to the church, then He has received us to Himself only in a spiritual sense.

14:4-6 - Jesus is the only way to the Father

Jesus further assured them that they knew where He was going and knew the way there. Peter had asked why He could not follow Jesus (13:37). Jesus had assured them they could follow later, but not yet (13:36). Now He is telling them that they know the way to where He was going.

Thomas responded that they did not know where He was going, so how could they know the way there? Jesus’ response shows that He

was going to the Father, and that is where they too could go. The way to go there is through Him and only through Him. He is the only way to have union with the Father and the hope of eternal life.

“Way” (ὁδός) “denotes ... a natural path, road, way ... metaphorically of a course of conduct, or way of thinking, ... the way instructed and approved by God; ... personified, of Christ as the means of access to the Father, John 14:6” (Vine). See also John 10:9; Rom. 5:1,2; Heb. 10:19,20; 9:8; Eph. 2:18; Acts 9:2; 22:4; 24:14).

Jesus’ death and resurrection provide the only means by which we may receive God’s grace so our sins may be forgiven and we can have fellowship with God, both now and in eternity. He is the only way lost sinners can come to the Father and remain in His fellowship. 1 Timothy 2:4-6 shows He is the mediator who makes salvation and prayer to the Father possible. This answered Thomas’ question, but Jesus went on to add even more.

“Truth” (ἀληθεια) “I. Objectively; 1. (univ.) what is true in any matter under consideration ... in reality, in fact, certainly ... 2. In reference to religion, the word denotes what is true in things pertaining to God and the duties of man ... c. the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of His purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man ... ‘I am He in whom the truth is summed up and impersonated,’ John 14:6...” Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. This truth is contrasted to all false religion and erroneous teaching. Cf. John 1:1ff (esp. v14); 8:32; 18:37.

Note God’s word is truth (John 17:17), but Jesus is the Word (1:1ff). The truth in religion is the reality or facts about God and His will for man. These are contained in His word, the Bible. Jesus personified or embodied that truth in that He lived and taught it perfectly and revealed it to man. For other passages about truth see Psalm 19:7-11; 25:4,5; 119:47,48,97,140-143,151; Proverbs 23:23; John 16:13; 17:17; Romans 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15,25,26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 1:22,23.

“Life” (ζωή) Cf. v19. Jesus is the source of life. He was the original giver of life in that all things were made through Him (John 1:1-3). He is the now the giver of spiritual life in that only He can provide forgiveness for those in sin. He is the only means by which we can receive eternal life (Acts 4:12).

No one can come to the Father except through Him. Neither Mohammed, Buddha, nor any heathen god can provide what Jesus can provide. To try to come by the Old Testament, as do Jews who reject Jesus, is to be lost. One can achieve unity with the Father only through Jesus. Such statements prove all other religious systems to be false religions and all other saviors to be false Saviors. There is salvation is no other way than the gospel of Jesus (Galatians 1:8,9). Specifically, no

system can save if it does not teach faith in Jesus as the one and only means to salvation. See Acts 4:12; John 8:24.

Such a claim affirms Jesus' Deity. What mere prophet or mortal man could properly make such a claim? If a mere mortal would make such a claim, would it be true? Yet Jesus' made the claim and proved it to be true by His miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and resurrection from the dead. Therefore, He must be more than a mere man. He was God in the flesh, which is exactly the main point John is demonstrating (John 1:1-3; 20:28-31).

Jesus had said He was going to prepare a place for them. Now He says they know the way, and He is the way to the Father. He is the way to have fellowship with the Father both now and ultimately in eternity.

14:7 - Jesus is the way to know the Father

Thomas' question showed that He did not fully know Jesus. Had He known Jesus, he would have known the Father and that Jesus was the way to the Father. Since Thomas asked the question, Jesus assured Him that, if we know and see Him, we know and see the Father.

Jesus is the revelation of the Father (John 1:14,18; 8:19; 16:3). When we know what He is like, we know what the Father is like. Again, He and His Father are one. As on 10:30 and 1:1-3, this does not mean that Jesus is the same individual Being as the Father, as some claim. They are separate individuals, just as Christians are separate individuals (17:20,21); but they are so united that, when you know what Jesus is like, then you know what the Father is like. The Son reveals the Father (1:18). See notes on 1:1-3 and 10:30 for more detailed discussions.

"Know" refers here to knowledge by experience. There is a difference between "knowing" about someone or having a passing acquaintance with them and knowing them in the sense of understanding their character and qualities. By knowing the character of Jesus, we can know what the character of God is like. He explains this further in vv 9,10. See also 1 John 2:3-6.

14:8,9 - Philip asks to see the Father

Philip apparently wanted a visible manifestation of the Father. Then He would be satisfied that He had known the Father. This, however, is impossible (John 1:18). So, Jesus explained His statement further.

He questioned how Philip could, after all this time, still not really know who He is. If He knew Jesus was God's Son, He would have known that seeing Him in the flesh is just as good as seeing the Father in the flesh. The Father and Son are so much alike that to see the Son is to see the Father. "If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all." Nothing here means they are the same individual being, but identical in character, etc.

See also 14:11,17,20; 12:45; Col. 1:15,19; 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3; John 1:1-3,18; 10:30; 17:21-26; 10:38; 17:11; cf. John 14:23.

14:10,11 - The Father and Son are in one another

Jesus then repeated that He is in the Father and the Father in Him (See notes on 10:38). This is the explanation of how people could see the Father in Him. Obviously if the Father was “in” Him, He was not the same individual as the Father. Jesus and His Father both partook of the nature of Deity. Both are in the Godhead. They were united as they want us to be united — John 17:20,21; cf. Phi. 3:20.

But how can we know Jesus? Through the record of His life revealed through the inspired apostles and prophets (v21; Acts 8:35; 1 Cor. 1:23; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 3:3,4). Even the teachings of Jesus were from the Father, not of His own origin. The Father spoke through Him and worked through Him (see notes on 12:48-50).

Note again that, when Jesus says He does not speak on His own authority, He is not denying that He possessed Deity. He is simply saying that the Father approved of all that He did, and His conduct was fully within the Father’s will. But what mere man could have claimed that, “to see me is to see God the Father” (v9)? Such must be a claim to Deity. No prophet ever made such a claim. Only Jesus could make it and prove it to be true.

Jesus then began to give proof that He and His Father were in one another, and He was revealing the nature of His Father. The first proof is the miracles that He did. The apostles had seen these miracles. The only reasonable explanation for these works was that God was abiding in Jesus and doing His work through them. This was sufficient proof and should have answered Philip’s question. Why did he have to ask?

This is the evidence that has been presented over and over again in John. The purpose of the miracles was to prove God was working through the one who did the miracles and to confirm the message spoken as being from God. (See notes on 5:36).

14:12 - Believers in Jesus can do greater works

Jesus had done great works that proved He was from God. But there was yet more evidence to come to prove that His message, the gospel, really was from God. Not only had He done miracles, but His followers would also do them after He went to His Father.

He had told them He would go to the Father, and they were concerned about the fact they could not go with Him. That is what started this conversation (13:33ff). Jesus has, by this point, discussed with them various aspects of His leaving, including answering questions they had as a result. Here He offered the evidence on which they should believe in Him, and did so in such a way as to return to the original topic. They should not have objected to His leaving because it was

part of His plan all along and would make it possible for them to do the kind of works He had done.

It is important, at several points in these chapters, to remember to whom Jesus is speaking. Much of what He says can be shown by other passages to be of universal application, applying to all Christians. But He is addressing the apostles who were with Him at the Passover feast (cf. John 13:5ff to Luke 22:7,14ff; cf. 15:27). Some of the promises here were meant only for them or primarily for them. They are not intended to be promises for all people, nor even for all Christians.

This passage is one that many people think applies to all Christians. We are told that if we have enough faith, all Christians can do miracles. Yet Paul in 1 Cor. 12:28-30 clearly showed this was not the case. The passage here was promising these gifts to the apostles. Other people received them through the apostles, but there was never a universal promise to all people. See also on Mark 16:14-20. Study also Acts 1:3-8,21,22; 2:1ff; 1 Cor. 13.

Jesus is here describing the “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12) which all of these men were eventually enabled to do as recorded in the book of Acts. But to do them, they would need faith in Him. At the time Jesus was speaking to them, their faith was weak. They would need to believe in Him based on the miracles He had done (v11) before they themselves could receive power to do miracles (v12). After He was raised and the Holy Spirit came upon them, their strength and understanding was far greater and they preached His word and did miracles with great power.

For further discussion of miracles and spiritual gifts, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Yet in what sense would the works they do be greater than what Jesus did? Clearly, they never did miracles that were more amazing than what He did. They duplicated many of them, including raising the dead, but they never did any that were more amazing than what He did. I am not sure what all Jesus refers to, but one sense in which the apostles did greater works was that they actually would, by their teaching and miracles, lead people to become Christians, members of Jesus’ church, and citizens in His kingdom. People would actually receive complete and lasting forgiveness in response to the apostles’ teaching. This was not the case, even with Jesus’ teaching. He laid the groundwork and offered the sacrifice that made salvation possible, but it would be the apostles who taught and baptized those who actually received that forgiveness. Even Jesus never did that. And whereas Jesus’ preaching was limited to Palestine, the apostles would take this message of salvation and do miracles throughout the world, giving opportunity to salvation to Gentiles and Jews everywhere.

14:13,14 - Jesus promised that He would do what they asked in His name

Jesus proceeds to give further assurance to the apostles, so they could have confidence despite the fact He was leaving them. Though He would be gone, they could make requests of the Father in Jesus' name, and He would answer or do what they requested. This would result in glory to the Father through Jesus.

The concept of acting in Jesus' name is described elsewhere (John 15:16; 16:23,24,26; 14:26; cf. Acts 4:7-12; Col. 3:17). Jesus is the mediator through whom we pray to God (1 Tim. 2:5). He makes it possible for God to hear our prayers, because He died to save us from sin (1 Tim. 2:4-6). We must go to God by Jesus' authority and in accordance with His will. This is implied in the expression "in Jesus' name."

God has promised to answer prayer, not just for the apostles, but for all His children. However, for all of us, we must ask in an acceptable manner and according to His will. Asking "in Jesus' name" requires asking in harmony with His will. There is no promise here that we can ask for any selfish thing we want and expect Him to answer. 1 John 5:14,15; 3:21,22; James 5:16; Matthew 7:7-11; 18:19; 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:13,14; cf. 1 Samuel 1:10-28; 7:5-11; 2 Kings 20:1-7; 2 Chronicles 7:11-14. The difference between the apostles and us is that God often answered their prayers miraculously (v13), whereas our prayers are answered through His providence in accord with natural law, not miraculously.

14:15 - Love for Jesus requires obedience

Not only did Jesus require the disciples to believe in Him (v12), but He also said they must love Him. He then clearly and unequivocally stated that those who love Him must keep His commands.

Again, this principle is true of all of us and is repeated often in Scripture. Love in the Bible is not just an emotion or feeling. It is a choice or determination of heart, which must show itself in how we act. Hence, love can be defined as "active good will." See also John 14:21-24,31; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 10:24; 1 John 2:3-6,15-17; 5:2,3; 2 John 5,6; Revelation 3:19.

Many people today say they know they are saved because they just have so much love for God, despite the fact they are not obeying Him. In fact, love is often used to justify disobedience. If someone points out that certain people are not following the Bible, and other people may respond, "I don't think that matters so much as long as they really love God." But it matters to Jesus! He said love means we must obey. He explained further that lack of obedience demonstrates lack of love (vv 21-24). Those who do not obey, and even use love as an excuse for people who disobey, are really showing that they do not have a proper,

Scriptural love for God. How can it not matter when people do not properly love God?

Notice further, that Jesus expected obedience to His commands on the basis of love for Him. This again implies that He knew He was Divine. Such a demand would be totally out of place coming from a mere human prophet. Other prophets might command people to obey the prophet's message, not because the people loved the prophet, but because they loved God.

14:16-18 - Jesus promises another Helper

Having said that He was leaving, Jesus continued to give further reassurance to His disciples by telling them He would send someone else to help them. He would pray the Father who would send this helper or comforter. He would not leave them like helpless orphans. Jesus said He Himself would come to them, not personally but through the work done by the One whom He would send. This promise is repeated and described several times by Jesus throughout this discussion with the apostles (14:25,26; 15:26; 16:7-13ff; etc.).

“Helper” or “Comforter” (παράκλητος) basically refers to one who gives aid. “...It was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defence, an advocate; then, generally, one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, advocate, as in 1 John 2:1, of the Lord Jesus. In the widest sense, it signifies a succourer, comforter. Christ was this to His disciples, by the implication of His word ‘another (*allos*, another of the same sort, not *heteros*, different) Comforter,’ when speaking of the Holy Spirit ... John 14:16 ... 14:26; 15:26; 16:7...” (Vine).

Similar words from the same root also indicate encouragement, exhortation, admonition, consolation, instruction (see v26). The point is that the Holy Spirit would take Jesus' place. Jesus had been a comforter to them; but He was now leaving, so He would not leave them without someone to help and encourage them. He knew they would need help and guidance in the coming difficult days, so He would send the Holy Spirit to meet this need. All that He Himself had done for them, the Holy Spirit would now do. This is described throughout the context in several following verses.

The Holy Spirit would provide this comfort by giving knowledge and instruction (v26; 16:13ff). This is why He is called here the “Spirit of Truth” — i.e., the Spirit characterized by truth, because He always speaks the truth. This contrasts to the Devil, who is the spirit that speaks lies and error.

The Holy Spirit would be the One to reveal the truth to the inspired men. As Jesus had patiently taught them God's will, so the Holy Spirit would do after Jesus was gone. He would give them the very **words** to speak in teaching others (1 Cor. 2:10ff; Matt. 10:19,20; etc.) These same benefits now come to us through the Scriptures that were

written by these men inspired by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:3,4; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 1:20,21).

Note that the Holy Spirit did come upon the apostles at Pentecost, fulfilling this promise. So, when Jesus speaks about going away, He means that He would ascend back to the right hand of the Father. In his sermon in Acts 2, Peter explained that this had been fulfilled.

Also note that this promise of personal guidance by the Holy Spirit was addressed to the apostles. Jesus directly stated that the world could not receive it because worldly people do not have the right attitude to receive it. Christians in general benefit from the work of the Holy Spirit by means of the word the inspired men wrote, but there is nothing here or elsewhere that promises personal, direct guidance of the Holy Spirit to all Christians (see notes on v12).

See notes below on v20 regarding the Holy Spirit being in them.

14:19,20 - When Jesus left, disciples would still be able to have a relationship with Him

Jesus again repeated that soon He would leave and the world would not see Him any longer. However, the disciples would see Him and would live because He would live. When the time came, they would know that He was in the Father and that He and the disciples were in one another.

The expression “in” someone, as used here, refers to fellowship or union with someone. This is explained in 17:20,21. See notes on John 10:38 and 14:10,11 where Jesus used this expression to describe His relationship to the Father. Here He adds that disciples would also be able to have such a relationship of fellowship with Him.

In v17 He had said the Holy Spirit would be in them. The presence or coming of the Holy Spirit to them (as it was fulfilled on Pentecost) would prove that Jesus was at the right hand of the Father and that fellowship with God was now possible because of what Jesus did for us. This is the very explanation Peter gave for the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

When Jesus arose from the dead and returned to Heaven, He would thereby prove that all of us could be raised from the dead and could receive eternal life in Heaven. We can have this life only through Him and only because He has it. The fact He has it is the proof we can have it. Hence, we live because He lives.

In what sense would the apostles be able to see Jesus, though the world could not see Him? Moses endured “as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). The invisible God is clearly seen through the things He made (Romans 1:20). This is the sight that comes by faith. No one can see Jesus physically now, just like we cannot see the Father. But by faith we know He is real and is there to bless us. This is the sense in which the disciples would see Him when the world could not. (There

could also be a reference to His appearances after the resurrection in which He appeared to the apostles but not to the world.)

14:21-24 - Our love for Jesus and the Father is expressed by our conduct

See notes on 14:15. Jesus here enlarged on the concept that people who love Him must obey Him. He expressed it every way it could be expressed. Those who keep His commands are the ones who love Him. Anyone who loves Him will keep His word. Those who don't love Him, don't keep His word. He appears determined to make sure we get the point, and yet some people still think they love Jesus even though they continue to disobey Him!

He repeats the promises that He and God will love and dwell with those who love Him enough to obey Him (see notes on v20). And He repeats that the Father gave Him His message, since He was acting as the Father's spokesman (see notes on 12:48-50). Hence, to fail to keep the word is to disobey the Father as well as Jesus.

Further, He said He would manifest Himself to those who love and obey Him. At this point, Judas asked him a question. This was another apostle named Judas, not Judas Iscariot. It probably refers to the one called Thaddeus or Lebbaeus in other accounts (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). He asked how it could be that Jesus would manifest Himself to the apostles but not to the world. This again contradicted Jewish expectations. They expected a Messiah who ruled on earth over the Jewish nation for the entire world to see. Hence, Jesus' statement made no sense to these confused Jews.

However, Jesus' rule is spiritual, in the church which is a spiritual kingdom (Col. 1:13,14; Matt. 16:18,19; John 18:36). So, we see Him also in a spiritual sense (see notes on v19). He rules us spiritually by faith. This is why love and obedience are essential to have Him in us, dwelling with us, etc. Just as the dwelling is not physical, so the seeing is not physical. We have a close personal relationship to Him because we understand the teaching that He manifested to us, and we respond by loving and obeying Him.

14:25,26 - The Holy Spirit would teach and remind them of all things

Jesus then returned to a further discussion of the Comforter (Helper) and what He would provide for the disciples when Jesus was gone (see vv 16-18). Jesus had taught them much while He was personally with them. Nevertheless, there was more that they needed to be taught which they had not yet received.

The Holy Spirit would fill this need. Note that the Helper previously promised is here identified as the Holy Spirit. He would be sent by the Father in Jesus' name and would bring to their remembrance

(remind them of) what Jesus had taught. He would also teach them all things (in contrast to “these things” that Jesus had taught).

Jesus had taught much, but He knew there was more they needed to learn (see 16:12,13,25). There were things they were not ready to accept and understand, so He had not taught them. But the Holy Spirit would come after Jesus’ death and resurrection, at a time when they would be much more able to understand. He would remind them of what Jesus taught and would give them the additional truths Jesus had not taught. The result would be that they would have “all things.”

The passage here identifies the three separate individuals of the Godhead. There is God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father would send the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. So, the Holy Spirit is not the Father, but the Father sent the Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is not the Son but was sent in the Son’s name.

Note that Jesus provision includes everything needed. He did not leave us without the information we need to serve Him. Anything not included in what the Holy Spirit revealed to inspired men is something we do not need. They receive “all things.” This includes a perfect remembrance of all Jesus’ teachings. This assures us that we have a perfect record of His life in the gospel accounts.

14:27 - Jesus offers peace to the disciples

Another blessing Jesus promised to give His disciples after He had left them was peace. He did not mean the kind of peace the world offers, but His peace.

“Peace” is εἰρήνη (corresponds to Heb. SHALOM). “...the sense of rest and contentment consequence ... on ... the harmon[ious] relationships between God and man, accomplished through the gospel” (Vine).

“...acc. to a conception distinctly peculiar to Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that it” –Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Other meanings of the word include security, safety, prosperity, etc. Other passages describing it are Rom. 5:1; 8:6; 10:15; 15:13; 2 Peter 3:14; John 16:33; Eph. 6:15; Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:7; Luke 2:14; 19:38,42; Acts 10:36.

The idea is probably best defined in the last part of the current verse: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.” Peace is the inward sense of calm, contentment, security, and lack of fear in the heart of a Christian that results from the assurance that affairs of life will work out for the best (Matt. 6:33; 1 Tim. 6:6-8). This mainly results from knowing one has a peaceful, harmonious relationship with God and is promised an eternal reward, rather than punishment (cf. Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 4:6ff; 1 John 4:18).

The world offers “peace” through wealth, power, pleasure, etc. But these do not really satisfy (Matt. 6:19-34; 13:22; 1 John 2:15-17; etc.).

The world offers these, but what it really gives is tribulation (John 16:33), problems, and sorrows (1 Tim. 6:6ff; Matt. 16:26). Jesus provides the only real peace.

The cause of strife and alienation between God and man is sin. People in sin are enemies of God – Colossians 1:19-23. We are subject to His wrath, deserving of punishment. Since sin is the problem, the only solution is forgiveness of sins, so the cause of alienation is removed. Only Jesus can provide the means of forgiveness, so He can provide peace that no one else can provide. As a result, we need not fear the consequences of our sins. We have peace of mind through Christ.

14:28 - The disciples should rejoice to hear that Jesus would go to the Father

Though Jesus was going to leave, in many ways this would not be a sad thing. It was a cause for rejoicing such that, if the disciples really loved Him, they would rejoice for Him that He was going to the Father.

Jesus' departure from this earth would end His life of suffering and hardship. He could return victoriously to the honor of the presence of His Father (Phil. 2:5ff; Acts 2:14ff).

It is amazing that, on the very night that He was facing the death of the cross, Jesus could look beyond it to the joy that followed (see Heb. 12:2). We need this same ability to look beyond our present sufferings to the joy ahead of us. This can help us to endure.

Jesus' whole life had been a great burden to Him, especially compared to the joys in heaven that He had left. Jesus had known from the beginning that He would have to die on that cross. Though it was now so near and He dreaded it so, yet it would be a great relief to have it over. So, He encouraged the disciples to look at it the same way, and even to rejoice with Him that it was almost over. As we draw close to some major burden ahead of us, it can still seem a relief to know that it is almost over.

Note that, if Jesus' leaving would be a blessing to Him, it would also be a blessing to all disciples. He was going to bring His sacrifice to God as the propitiation for our sins, then to begin His kingdom, and ultimately to reign at God's right hand. He would also send the Holy Spirit. All these facts would result in great blessings to Jesus' followers. So, His going was a cause of joy to them, as well as to Him.

In what sense is the Father "greater than" Jesus? Both possess Deity, so it cannot be that the Father is Deity and Jesus is not, as some people falsely teach (see John 1:1-3; 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8; etc.). For one thing, while He was on earth, Jesus subjected Himself to the Father as we humans must do (Phil. 2:5-8). Yet, there is also a sense in which the Father continues to have authority over the Son (1 Cor. 11:3). There appears to be a variation in authority **among** the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But that does not in any way affect **us**. To us, their authority is

all the same. They each have complete authority over created things in that we must obey all they say. That is the essence of Deity. What any one of the three says is exactly the same as what the others say.

14:29 - Jesus predicts these events so that their fulfillment would produce faith

Jesus had told them all these things ahead of time so that, when they came to pass, they would believe in Him. This is the essence of fulfilled prophecy. Like other prophets, Jesus predicted the future so people would recognize the fulfillment and believe that the one who spoke the prophecy was from God.

This in turn strengthens faith so people do not fall away in times of hardship. These would be hard times facing the apostles after Jesus left them. They would be tempted to fall away if their faith was not strengthened. Seeing the fulfillment of Jesus predictions would give them the strength they needed to endure. Instead of thinking that these terrible events were a mistake or worse yet a great defeat for Jesus, proper understanding would lead men to see that God intended this all along. Instead of shaking men's faith, it ought to confirm it.

Jesus is known to be the Son of God because He fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. However, He Himself made predictions that came true. The power to predict the future is just one more of the many proofs that confirm Him to be a messenger from God. Therefore, His message is true in all that He taught, and we ought to believe His claims and His teaching.

See notes on 13:19.

14:30 - Jesus states that His time to speak to them is short

Jesus was going to leave and would not walk among them any more — i.e., not as He had during His lifetime. He would return after His death, but it would not be the same then.

The prince (αρχων) or ruler of the world is Satan. See John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor.4:4; (Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 4:4; 5:19). Scripture often speaks of the world as being contrary to God, because all people at times sin and obey Satan, thereby putting themselves under his power (1 John 2:15; Gal. 5:16ff). Hence, Satan is the ruler of it. He was “coming” in that His time to persecute and do his worst to harm Jesus was about to come.

“He has nothing in” Jesus in the sense that he had no power over Jesus. There was nothing in Jesus that desired to serve Satan, nor any means Satan could use to lead Jesus astray from His purpose. He really did not even have power to put Jesus to death. Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. He would die, not because Satan had greater power, but because Jesus was going to allow it (v31).

Such a statement is an amazing affirmation of Jesus' sinlessness. What mere human, even if he were a great prophet, could truthfully

say that Satan had no power over him? What prophet ever made such a claim? Only Jesus could say it such that no one could prove it to be untrue.

14:31 - Jesus would submit to death because He loved the Father

Satan had no power over Jesus, but Jesus was going to die anyway. Why? Because He loved the Father, and because the Father gave Him a commandment. As Jesus prayed in the Garden, as a human He would have preferred to avoid the suffering and shame. But He submitted to the will of the Father, because He loved the Father (cf. John 10:18; Gen. 3:15).

Hence, it would actually be Satan who caused His death, and thereby caused Jesus to leave the disciples. But by telling them beforehand, He could strengthen their faith that this was not a defeat at the hands of Satan. Nor would He have to change His plans to overcome Satan, after He had been unable to stop Satan from killing Him. In fact, it was all planned this way from the beginning.

“Arise, let us go from here.” Apparently, to this point they had still been talking in the place where they had eaten the Passover. The remaining teachings in this lengthy discussion must have occurred on their way to the Mount of Olives. (Some say they arose to leave, but He continued speaking as the prepared to leave, etc.).

John 15

15:1-10 - The Parable of the Vine and the Branches

One of the most frequently used illustrations in the Bible is that of a grapevine or vineyard. Grapes were commonly grown in Israel and were greatly valued as a food. People in that society were familiar with the activities involved in growing them. Since illustrations help people learn, vines were often used to teach spiritual lessons. (See Isaiah 5:1ff; Psalm 80:8ff; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; Romans 11:17ff; Luke 13:6-9; Matthew 21:33ff; 20:1ff; Ezekiel 19:10ff; 1 Corinthians 3:9.)

Jesus used the illustration here to teach lessons about three people or groups of people: God the Father, God the Son, and Jesus' disciples.

15:1,2 – The husbandman illustrates God

A husbandman (Greek: γεωργος) is a farmer or, in this case, a vinedresser: one in charge of caring for a vineyard. Jesus said He Himself is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. Obviously, both are symbols. This is another of the many “I am” passages in John in which Jesus emphasizes His special nature, and generally shows that He is not just a man nor even just a prophet but the Divine Son of God.

As the husbandman, God does the following things:

The husbandman removes unfruitful branches – vv 2,6.

He examines each branch and judges its fruitfulness. Those who do not bear fruit are “taken away” (v2) and “cast into the fire and burned” (v6).

To bear (Gk φερω) means to bring forth. Fruit (Gk. καρπος) here refers to the kind of characteristics and good works that God has commanded His disciples to produce (see notes on vv 5-8 below). Note that a Christian's fruit will **include** making converts for Jesus (John 4:35,36; Romans 1:13; Philippians 1:22; Proverbs 11:30). But that is just part of the fruit Jesus wants.

This is intended as a lesson warning us that, even as disciples of Christ, we can be lost. Note some other references where similar illustrations teach the same point.

Romans 11:20-22 – The branches of an olive tree are used to show that the Jews had been in covenant relationship with God, but they fell because of unbelief. Gentiles were saved, but likewise if they fall, God will not spare them. This illustrates the goodness and severity of God.

Luke 13:6-9 — A fig tree planted in a vineyard illustrates the fact that God expects fruit. He is patient and gives people a chance to produce fruit. But if still no fruit is born, he has them cut down.

This clearly defeats the doctrine of the “impossibility of apostasy.” These branches are “in Christ,” meaning they are disciples (vv 5,6). They are part of His spiritual body, attached to Him. They are people who have been forgiven of sins (cf. Galatians 3:26,27; 1 John 2:6). Yet, they were cast into the fire, because they failed to accomplish the Father’s will. This is illustrated by Judas’ betrayal, which may still have been on Jesus’ mind as He gave this warning.

These and many other verses clearly teach that a child of God can be eternally lost because of unfruitfulness. (See also Acts 8:12-24; Romans 6:12-18; 8:12-17; Galatians 5:1-4; 6:7-9; 1 Corinthians 9:25-10:12; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22.)

For further evidence that a child of God can so sin as to be eternally lost, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

The husbandman purges the fruitful branches — v2.

Even fruitful branches sometimes develop disease or some hindrance to fruit bearing. The husbandman prunes these away. (“Prune,” Gk. κοθαίρω, is translated “cleanse” in ASV, “purge” in KJV. See related word in 1 Timothy 1:5; 3:9; etc.)

So, Christians who are fruitful sometimes have a sin or weakness that hinders their usefulness to God. God tries, if possible, to remove this without destroying the whole branch. But if the disease spreads and cannot be cured, the whole branch must be destroyed.

Hebrews 12:5-11 gives another illustration comparing this to a father’s chastisement of his child. God chastens His children because He loves us (v6), for our profit (v10). This causes us to yield the fruit of righteousness (v11).

15:3 – The disciples had been cleansed by Jesus’ teaching

Jesus states that the branches (disciples) have already been cleansed (purged, pruned), as in v2. How does God cleanse or prune us?

God chastens by the teaching of His word (see v3).

Hebrews 3:12,13 — So that we do not fall away, we need to be exhorted daily.

Hebrews 4:11,12 — That we might not be disobedient, the word of God pierces our soul like a two-edged sword.

Hebrews 10:23-25 — To help us hold fast, we need to attend when the church is assembling together so we can be exhorted.

God works through His word to prick our hearts and motivate us to correct problems in our lives.

God sometimes chastens by trials and tribulations.

Hebrews 12:5-11 describes God's chastisement of His people. But the context discusses problems caused by the hardships people were facing (10:32ff; 11:32-37; 12:2-4). The author encourages people that, instead of falling away in these times of suffering, they should realize that God can use the problems to chasten them.

James 1:2-4 — Trials prove our faith so we lack in nothing.

This is not to say that every problem comes from God or was caused by some specific sin. But God does allow suffering, knowing it will make us more fruitful in His service.

15:4,5 – Jesus is the vine

Jesus has now stated twice that He is the vine — vv 1,5. We (disciples) can bear fruit only if we “abide” in Jesus and He abides in us. Separated from Jesus we can accomplish nothing worthwhile. “Abiding” in Jesus, throughout this context, illustrates the concept of spiritual fellowship: a proper relationship that ties us to our Master (see below on vv 6-8; cf. John 17:20,21).

Philippians 4:19 — God supplies every need in Christ. The vine connects the branches to the roots so the branches are held in place and supplied with the necessities of life — water, nourishment, minerals, etc. Notice some things that, like a vine, Jesus supplies us:

The vine supplies strength.

Colossians 2:6,7 — Walk in Christ, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith. The vine is rooted in the ground and holds the branches rooted and established in place, so they are not carried away and their fruitfulness destroyed. Likewise, Jesus roots and establishes us, so we can be fruitful.

Ephesians 3:17 — If Christ dwells in our hearts, we are rooted and grounded in love, and may be strong (v16 — cf. v20f). We will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine (4:14). [Philippians 4:13]

The vine supplies nourishment.

Ephesians 5:29 — A man should nourish and cherish his wife as he does his own body, just like the Lord does the church.

1 Timothy 4:16 — We are nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine. [1 Peter 2:2]

Psalms 1:3,4 — A righteous man is like a tree planted by a river, where all his needs are met so he brings forth fruit. An ungodly man is like chaff driven by the wind.

The vine supplies all spiritual blessings.

Ephesians 1:3 — We have all spiritual blessings in Christ.

2 Peter 1:3 — His divine power grants to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us. [2 Corinthians 9:8,10; Colossians 2:19; Philippians 1:11,19]

Branches cannot bear fruit alone. They must have a source of supply for their needs. So, we must bear fruit; but we cannot do it alone. We must have the blessings Jesus supplies.

15:6-8 - The branches illustrate disciples

Some people think the branches are denominations, and all denominations are just different branches in Christ. This not only violates other Scripture, it also violates this context. Each branch is called “he,” “him,” “a man,” etc. — vv 5,6. They are disciples — v8.

Notice the lessons taught:

Branches must bear fruit — vv 2,4,5,8.

Why must we bear fruit?

Matthew 13:23 — In the parable of the sower, the good ground bears fruit. This is what distinguishes good ground from unacceptable ground — soils are not good when they are unfruitful (v22).

Luke 3:8,9 — John taught people to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.

The purpose of every plant on a farm or tree in an orchard or vine in a vineyard is to **bear fruit**. This is the reason for its existence. If it is not productive, there is no reason for it to exist. Likewise, the purpose for Christians is to produce fruit for God. If we do not produce, He will not continue to consider us His.

John 15:8 — The Father is glorified if we bear much fruit. If you visit a farm and see fruitful, productive plants, this glorifies the farmer. But if you see all kinds of thistles and weeds, and the plants are not productive, this reflects unfavorably on him. So, a Christian must bear fruit to accomplish his purpose of existence and to glorify God. Church members who are not producing fruit are a disgrace to the Father.

(Matthew 5:16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Mark 11:12-14,20; Romans 11:17-24)

What kind of fruit must we bear?

John 15 does not really describe the fruit, but other passages do.

Colossians 1:10 — That you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. A godly, righteous life, with all the good works righteousness involves — that is the kind of fruit Jesus requires. (Philippians 1:9,10)

Galatians 5:22-24 — The fruits of the Spirit are listed. These are some of the qualities we must put on to be fruitful. To do this successfully, we must put to death the works of the flesh (vv 19-21) — these are the thorns and thistles we must remove.

2 Peter 1:5-8 — Here is another list of qualities Christians should add to our lives. If we have these, we are not barren or **unfruitful**. The fruits Christians must produce are the works of faith and obedience God has taught us in His word to develop in our lives.

(James 3:17,18; 2:20; Ephesians 5:7-11; John 4:36; Philippians 4:17; Hebrews 12:11; 13:15; Colossians 1:10; Titus 3:14; Matthew 7:16; Philippians 1:11; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23)

How do we produce this fruit?

We must **abide in** (Greek μένω) the vine. Without Him, we can do nothing (vv 4-6). What does it mean to abide in Jesus?

John 17:20-23 — To be “in the Father and Son” is to be **one** with them — in spiritual union or fellowship with them. To produce fruit, a vine must be securely fastened to the vine, not separated from it. So, we must be firmly in union with God to bear spiritual fruit.

Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3 — We come **into** Christ at the point when we are **baptized** into Him, after we have believed and repented. When we are baptized — not before — is when our fellowship or union with Christ begins.

Matthew 13:22 — We become unfruitful when we allow the cares of the world, riches, etc., to choke the word. Then we cease to abide in the vine, and are cast off and burned (John 15:2,5,6; Isaiah 59:1,2).

1 John 2:4-6; 3:24 — We know that we are in Him, if we keep His commands.

We come into Christ (His fellowship) when by faith we obey His word in baptism. We stay in Him by continued obedience to His word, bearing the fruits of good works He requires. When we let other things choke our good works, sin enters our lives. He works with us for a time to prune away that disease, hoping we will repent. If we do not repent, we are cut off. In the judgment, we will be cast out and burned. (See also 1 John 4:12,15,16; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 1:3-10.)

Every branch must bear fruit — vv 2,6

Every branch that does not bear fruit, He takes away.

Luke 3:9 — **Every** tree that does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down.

2 Corinthians 5:10 — All will be judged and **each** one will receive what He has done.

Fruit bearing is an individual responsibility. We cannot expect the husbandman to be pleased with us just because the branches around us are fruitful. (Ezekiel 18:20)

Each branch must bear much fruit — vv 5,8.

If we abide in Him we must bear **much** fruit, and the Father is glorified if we bear **much** fruit.

Philippians 1:11 — Be **filled** with the **fruits** of righteousness. The husbandman is not satisfied when a branch puts forth a little effort. He wants our best effort.

Colossians 1:10 — Walk worthily of the Lord in all pleasing, **bearing fruit in every good work**. You can't just pick out one or two good works and quit. You must have them all.

2 Peter 1:8 — If these qualities (vv 5-8) are in you and **abound**, then you are not unfruitful.

Every person has different abilities, but we must work in every area God instructs us to, and we must strive to the best of our ability to produce the good works He wants.

Each branch must *increase* in bearing fruit — v2.

The husbandman prunes the branches so they bear **more** fruit. We must never be satisfied with the fruit born in the past, but must continually strive each day, month, year, to bear more fruit than in the past.

2 Corinthians 9:10 — God supplies us so we can **increase** the fruits of our righteousness.

Mark 4:8 — The good ground, in the parable of the sower, bore fruit and **increased**. A little plant cannot bear as much fruit as a big one. God expects us to grow so we can increase our production. (Philippians 1:9; 2 Peter 3:18)

When you cut down a tree, you can count a ring in the trunk for every year the tree lived, because every year the tree grew. The only tree that does not grow is a dead tree. God expects His plants to not only bear fruit, but to grow and increase their capacity to bear.

Jesus added that, if we ask whatever we will, it will be done for us. But this is true only if we “abide in Him” and His words abide in us. We fail to abide in Him when we make requests for the sake of fulfilling our own greed and lustful desires. And even things we think are best may yet be denied because God knows better than we (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). To abide in Jesus we must ask that His will be done.

15:9,10 - To abide in Jesus' love, we must keep His commands

Having given the basic teachings of the vine illustration, Jesus gives some related teachings, tying them in to previous teachings.

Jesus has shown that we must continue in this close fellowship, which He describes as “abiding in” Him. Here He shows that the result will be love for one another. All the individuals/groups involved love one another (cf. 14:15,21-24; 17:24,26; see note on 15:12). And again, we abide in love by keeping God’s commands, like Jesus kept His Father’s commands and abode in His love. See notes on 14:15,21-24, etc.

This does not mean that, if we sin, God ceases to love us. God loves all men, even those in sin (John 3:16; Romans 5). To abide in love means to continue in the relationship in such a way that we receive the benefits of love. To do this, we must act in harmony with love. If we do not obey, then **we** are not acting in love and hence the fellowship of love is broken. We are not “abiding in” love, not because God does not extend it, but because we have violated it.

15:11-27 - Further Encouragement; Promise of the Spirit

15:11 - The results of Jesus' teaching will be joy

Jesus explained then that He spoke these things so we might receive the joy He has to offer and that joy may be full. True joy comes from serving Jesus (cf. 16:24; 17:13). This joy is full joy. Many people seek joy in physical achievements: wealth, pleasure, power, popularity, athletics, physical beauty, etc. But that joy is ultimately empty. The joy that is full is the joy Jesus gives.

This joy is not a constant emotional high. Nor is it the result of pleasant physical surroundings. This is proved by the fact that Jesus says He will give us His joy. What joy did He have on the very night before His betrayal, arrest, trials, and crucifixion? We will soon see Him deeply distressed and troubled as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was not emotionally thrilled, nor did He face pleasant physical circumstances. Yet, He had joy.

The joy Jesus gives is an inner knowledge that we have God's blessings, and that we are abiding in Him and in His love. This is the joy Jesus had, even as He faced the cross. This joy sustains us, even when our circumstances are unfavorable and our hearts saddened.

(See Matthew 13:44; 25:21,23; Luke 6:23; 10:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:6,8; 4:13.)

15:12,13 - Jesus commands us to love one another with the love that sacrifices even ones life

Jesus then returned to the importance of love and repeated the command that we should love one another as He loved us. See notes on 13:34. Then He showed again that love is demonstrated by what we do. And the greatest love is that one would be willing to give his life for his friends (Greek φίλος — one who is loved).

This not only illustrates love, it defines it. Love is a willingness to give of oneself for the good or well being of others. This concern for others will cause us to put their welfare ahead of our own. The greatest degree of that love, Jesus said, is that we be willing to give our lives for someone else. This connects to the love Jesus had for us (v12) because He was about to lay down His life for us. This proves His love and that He was treating us as friends (Romans 5:5-8; John 3:16; 1 John 4:10,11; Ephesians 2:4-6).

We in turn are to love others as He loved us. We should be willing to give our lives for Him and for one another (cf. Revelation 2:10). We do this, not just in physical death, but by using our lives every day in doing what is good for others (Romans 12:1; Matthew 16:24,25; 10:38,39; John 12:25; 2 Corinthians 8:5).

Hence, love is the power that moves us to keep God's commands, and Jesus' example shows us how to manifest love.

(See Ephesians 4:2,31-5:2; Philippians 2:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9,10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8,9; 4:8; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-18,23; 4:8-5:3.)

15:14,15 - Jesus classes His disciples as friends, but shows that obedience is the requirement of this friendship

Jesus had said that the greatest expression of love is to die for ones friends. But He was about to die for us in demonstration of His love, so He classes His disciples as His friends (Greek φίλος). Who are His friends? Those who do what He commands! He showed His love by dying for us. We respond by showing we love Him in obeying His commands.

In a sense, Jesus loves all men and wants to be friends with them all. He died to extend forgiveness to all. But we receive that forgiveness and the benefits of His death only if we obey His commands. Hence, we act like friends, and we receive the benefits He offers to His friends, only when we respond by obedience (Romans 6:3).

Because He died for His disciples, Jesus no longer called them servants (Greek δούλος — cf. Matthew 10:24; 12:13; Ephesians 6:5; 1 Timothy 6:1; etc.). A servant is a bondsman, a slave, a man of servile condition (see Thayer). It is true that we still must obey Jesus. But our relationship is that, not merely of a slave, but of a friend. Our Master loves us. He holds us dear and works for our good. He does not just expect us to work for His good.

Jesus gave a specific example of this difference. A master does not bother to explain to a slave what his plans are. He just gives orders and the slave must obey. A friend, however, explains His requests and ideas. So, Jesus made known to them the will of the Father, like a friend would do for another.

15:16,17 - Jesus chose the disciples that they might bear fruit

Another evidence of Jesus' friendship is that He chose them. They did not choose Him. This is one of the "not ... but" phrases in Scripture, in which the "not" phrase is not intended to constitute a complete denial, but refers simply to something less important and less emphasized than the "but" phrase (see notes on 6:27; cf. Matthew 20:28). The disciples had chosen to serve Jesus; but much more importantly, He had chosen them and urged them to bear fruit.

In a sense, this statement is true of all disciples, in that all of us are God's elect. But this election depends on our willingness to choose to respond to the gospel. But here Jesus refers especially to these apostles. He had especially chosen them from among His disciples to do His special work (cf. 6:70; 13:18). The fruit they were to bear refers

especially to their work in testifying of Him and preaching the gospel after He had gone.

Jesus then repeated the promise that God will give whatever they ask in Jesus' name, as in 14:13,14 (see notes there regarding asking "in Jesus' name") (cf. 15:7). Note that prayer is addressed to the Father in Jesus' name. Here this is expressly stated. Jesus is intimately involved in our prayers, since He serves as the mediator between God and us. But the prayers themselves are addressed to the Father (see Matthew 6:9; John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23,24,26; Ephesians 5:20; Romans 1:8; Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:5).

And again, Jesus repeated that He intended for all these instructions to lead them to love one another.

15:18,19 - The world hates Jesus' disciples even as it hates Him

Jesus then discussed at some length the response the disciples can expect from the world when they do their work for Him, preaching the message of the gospel. They should have love for one another, but may as well expect no such favorable attitude from the world. See Matthew 5:10-12; 13:21; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 8:17-39; 2 Corinthians 1:4-10; 4:17; 7:4; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1,15-19; 5:10.

Scripture often uses "the world" to refer to people or society in general who live according to their own desires, rather than following God's will. As a result, "the world" becomes an expression for the unconverted, unspiritual mass of humanity, in contrast to the followers of Christ.

The world will hate us (especially the apostles), but when it happens we should remember it happened first to our Master. There is great comfort in knowing that others have the same problems we have (James 5:10,11).

But it is even more important to know that our Master was treated this way. When we suffer, we are just following His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21-24; Hebrews 12:1ff). We should not conclude that we are suffering because we have done something wrong, resulting in some strange, unexpected reaction (1 Peter 4:12ff). Rather, when we do right, persecution is sure to come to us just as it did to Him. Further, we can know He assured us ahead of time it would happen, so don't be surprised. Realize it is just a fulfillment of the kinds of behavior men have shown for years.

The world hates us because we are not of (like) the world, but Jesus chose us out of the world. The world would actually love us, if we would be like them. The differences between the world and us are what cause worldly people to hate us.

The average human hates and resents excellence in others in many aspects of life. He may wish that he himself could excel, because

of the exaltation it gives him. But he resents it when others excel him. This is true in many areas of life. Anything that is far above or far below “normal” is resented. The perfect illustration of this is that the world crucified Jesus with two thieves. The thieves were killed because they were too far below normal, and Jesus was killed because He was too far above normal! (Cf. John 7:7; 3:19-21; 17:14; 1 John 3:13.) This is what causes the basic antagonism between God and the world (1 John 2:15-17).

The world especially hates those who excel in moral or spiritual matters. Good people, by their very lives, rebuke the world for not living up to the same high standard. When nobody does right, sinners feel justified in their wrong: “See, nobody can do any better than I am.” But when others **are** doing better, then the evil man has no excuse for his sins. So, he resents the one who does right. He may even attempt to cause the good person to stumble into sin or quit doing right. He may rejoice when sins are found in the lives of supposedly good people. If no sins are found, he makes up some false accusation to make it appear good people are not good. Then the sinner can again feel justified.

Note that Jesus assumes His followers will be different from the world. So few people in the world follow Jesus’ teaching, and His teaching is so unique, that those who truly follow Him will stand out from others. But unfortunately, this is not always what happens among those who claim to follow Him. Far too often, professed Christians **are** like the world. There is so little difference that there is no reason for the world to hate these “good” people. In many cases they love us because we **are** part of them, and the world “loves its own.” We need to examine to see whether perhaps we are too loved by the world, because we are not different from it as we should be (Romans 12:2; James 4:4).

15:20,21 - Disciples should expect treatment like the Lord received

The evidence that the world will hate us, as Jesus had said, is that a servant is not greater than His master. This is admitted by all (cf. 13:16; Luke 6:40). If people have such brazen disrespect and outright hatred that they would even kill the Son of God, how can His followers expect any better treatment? If they will treat the great, respected leader in such a way, why would they hesitate to mistreat lowly servants?

They will no more obey the teachings of Jesus’ followers than they would keep His own personal teachings. If they persecuted Him, they will do so to us (2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 14:22). In practice, of course, a minority did keep His word, and a minority will follow the teachings of the apostles. But the majority rejected Jesus when He was alive, and they will reject our teaching likewise. We see many examples of this in the book of Acts.

Why does the world so act? They killed Jesus because they did not know Jesus or Him who sent Him. Likewise, if we act in His name,

they will so resent us. These people, like the Pharisees and scribes, may claim to be religiously devout, but their conduct shows they are really concerned about pleasing themselves, maintaining their following among the people, etc. They did not properly respect Jesus, because they did not properly respect God. And they did not have a right relationship with God because they don't care enough about God.

This is the "bottom line." People reject Jesus and His teachings, not because they lack evidence that Jesus is from God, but because they lack commitment to serve God. Those who are truly devoted to God's service will investigate Jesus' claims seriously and will accept them. Those who reject His claims are those who would not serve God properly even without Jesus and His claims.

Note how this verse illustrates an important principle of Bible study. Jesus stated a general principle: A servant is not greater than his master. Then He applied it to the specific case: If they persecuted Jesus, they would persecute His followers. This kind of teaching is often done in Scripture. This concept is important to us, because the general principle will have more applications than just the one stated in the specific context. This kind of teaching occurs often in Scripture. We must be careful to make sure we know a principle is general, before we apply it in other cases. But the concept is very useful, if we use it properly.

Here is another example. Many passages say that we should follow God's word without changing it or accepting human changes to it (Matthew 15:9; Revelation 22:18,19; etc.). These statements are usually made in some specific context and application, so some people argue that we may apply them only to that specific case. But this is a general principle being applied in a specific case. One evidence that this is true is the fact the principle is applied in Scripture to so many different cases. So, we may properly apply the principle to many other cases.

15:22-25 - Jesus' coming leaves men without excuse for their sin

Keep these verses in context with the persecution and hatred Jesus had been discussing. The "sin" referred to here is stated in vv 23-25 to be the specific sin of hating and rejecting Jesus (which sin would be repeated in the persecution of His followers, according to the context). Had Jesus not come, the people would surely have been guilty of sin, but not of this sin. But since He had come, they demonstrated hatred of Him, and in doing so demonstrated hatred of the Father.

His life made it obvious there was no excuse for their sins. His life proved without question that He was the Son of God. His miracles and fulfillment of prophecy should have convinced them He was from God. There was no excuse for their killing Him. But by rejecting Jesus even after seeing His miracles, they showed their hatred for Him. And in hating Him, they showed hatred for the Father who sent Him.

The passage is not saying that there would have been no guilt, no sin, and no punishment had Jesus not come. People were already guilty of sin (transgression of God's law), and that is the reason Jesus had to come! He came to solve the problem of guilt. But when He came and they rejected Him, they committed the greatest sin of all, and proved they were without excuse.

When they hated and rejected Jesus, they people again fulfilled prophecy that showed they would reject Him. (Psalm 35:19; 69:4). There was no real grounds for the hatred and punishment the Jews dealt to Jesus. They fabricated some reasons, but they were not valid.

Their hatred was groundless, yet it fulfilled prophecies in their own law, which had predicted all along (contrary to premillennial views) that Jesus would be hated and rejected.

15:26 - The Holy Spirit would testify about Jesus

Jesus then reminded them of the promise that the Holy Spirit would come (cf. 14:16,17,26). He would testify who Jesus really was (God's Son). Jesus was not an impostor. When the Spirit came (on Pentecost), He began to reveal the gospel that told who Jesus was; then He empowered the apostles to do miracles to confirm the word and to explain the prophecies Jesus fulfilled.

This is the means the apostles used repeatedly throughout Act to convince people Jesus was God's Son. Hence, the spirit bore witnesses through the teaching of the apostles (Acts 1:8).

Note again that the Spirit would be sent from the Father, and Jesus would join in sending Him. Such language necessarily implies that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate and distinct living Beings. All there are clearly identified here. The Holy Spirit was the One who would be sent, but He was sent by Jesus and proceeded from the Father.

15:27 - The apostles would also bear witness

By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles would also bear witness [Gk. μαρτυρεω] of Jesus, because they had been with Him from the beginning. This proves without question that Jesus is here addressing the apostles. Here we see conclusive evidence that at least part of what Jesus teaches here applies only to the apostles, not to disciples in general. We have not been with Jesus from the beginning, nor was Jesus promising we would receive the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit as He here promised the apostles.

To be an apostle, one had to be an eyewitness of Jesus, especially that He was raised from the dead. He had to be able to personally bear this testimony of Jesus (see Acts 1:8,21,22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39,41; 13:31; Luke 24:48; John 19:35; 21:24; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 1 John 1:2,3; 4:14). We cannot bear this testimony, nor can anyone alive today. Hence, there are no apostles today, nor does any-

one today have the direct guidance of the Spirit described here. Those gifts are not needed because we now have the word written by those inspired men (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Note that Jesus here identifies two sources of testimony regarding Him, not just one source. Note the word “also.” The Holy Spirit bore witness of Jesus and the apostles “also” bore witness, since they had seen all Jesus’ works. The Holy Spirit gave testimony to Jesus (and to the apostles’ message) by the miracles that the Spirit empowered them to do, fulfilled prophecy, etc. But the apostles “also” acted as witnesses in their own right, since they had personally seen the events that establish Jesus’ claims to be true.

We believe the gospel message (both the teaching of Jesus and that of the apostles), because we believe Jesus was Divine and we believe the gospel writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit. But before anyone can believe these facts are true, he needs evidence. That evidence is based on the eyewitness testimony given by the apostles themselves and by others who recorded what they and Jesus did and taught (John 20:30,31).

It is important for us to realize that the apostles were qualified witnesses, additionally and even apart from the Divine guidance they received from the Holy Spirit. It is true that the Spirit assisted them to give their testimony most effectively, as described in context here (cf. Acts 1:8). But it is also true that they were eyewitnesses, and this eyewitness testimony is fundamental to our faith. We believe in Jesus, because we believe the testimony of those who saw the miracles he did and who saw the evidence He had been raised from the dead. Then we believe the eyewitness testimony that He said the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth and the eyewitness testimony that they did miracles to confirm their message. The testimony of eyewitnesses has the force of independent confirmation that convinces us these men were really inspired. After we are convinced of this, then we must believe every teaching they give as being the word of God.

Jesus was here arranging for the work that needed to be carried on after His death. The apostles would do the work guided by the Holy Spirit. Despite the fact Jesus was about to die, He made arrangements to provide all that would be needed for our salvation. We should rejoice in what we received from the apostles even as they rejoiced in receiving and revealing it.

John 16

Chap. 16 - Continued Preparation for Jesus' Departure

16:1 - Jesus spoke so they would not stumble

Jesus had just described many blessings He would provide the apostles after He left. He had also warned that they would face persecution and opposition, and He had admonished them of the need to continue to bear fruit for Him. Here He explained why He had given these instructions.

Jesus was about to leave and He knew the problems the apostles would face. There would be times of confusion, grief, disillusion, discouragement, and persecution ahead. They would need strength to help them. He was saying these things so they would not stumble when they faced these problems. (Cf. v4; See 14:29; 13:19.)

Problems are much easier to bear when we are prepared for them and anticipate them. We are much more easily discouraged and defeated when problems come that we did not believe would come and are not prepared for.

16:2,3 - The persecution coming would include exclusion and even death

Jesus then described again the persecution facing them, which would tend to cause them to stumble if they were not ready for it. They would be put out of synagogues. This practice had already begun (9:22,34; 12:42). People would refuse to associate with them because of their beliefs (Luke 6:22). This was a form of social ostracism, but its impact would be much more severe than we might imagine. People in that society were almost entirely Jewish. If one was put out of the synagogue, the harm would affect not only friendships but also business dealings and more. The disciples needed to know this was coming, so they could be prepared to deal with it.

Worse yet, men would kill them thinking they were serving God by so doing. This is the kind of persecution Saul brought against Christians before he was converted (Acts 26:9-11; 22:3,4). Of course, this would be done to Jesus first, but later many suffered the same fate, such as Stephen (Acts 7), James (Acts 12), and others. Jesus here predicts the extreme fanaticism with which the Jews would oppose the gospel.

The reason men do such things, even claiming God's authority for their conduct, is that they don't really know God. Note that, like Saul (Acts 26:9; Galatians 1:13,14), they **think** they are serving God, but they don't really know His will and have a true relationship with Him

(cf. 15:21). It is entirely possible for men to think they are pleasing to God and are working for Him, even when they are actually opposing His work (cf. Matt. 7:21-23). We need to help people realize this possibility and also be on guard to make sure it is not our own case.

16:4 - Jesus hopes they will remember these warnings when they are fulfilled

Jesus then explained further how the apostles would be benefited by the fact He had told them these things (see v1; cf. 14:29; 13:19). When these things happened and the times He was speaking of would come, they would remember what Jesus had said and that would encourage them.

It is much easier to accept a thing when we know it was planned and anticipated by the one who is in charge and can help us deal with it. We are much more likely to keep a bargain if we know ahead of time all that it will require of us.

Many of these details He had not discussed with them earlier because they still had Him with in their physical presence. Up to this point, the brunt of the opposition had fallen on Jesus Himself, and He had been there to help them deal with whatever problems came. But now He would be gone. The disciples must face the lion's share of the opposition, and they would not have Jesus' presence to strengthen and guide them. So they needed an understanding of what to expect.

16:5,6 - Jesus would no longer be with them, resulting in great sorrow

Though He had been with them, He was preparing to leave, so these instructions were now needed (see 13:33; 14:2; etc.).

He said none of them were asking where He would go. He knew they did not understand where He was going (vv 17,18,25ff) and were even perplexed about the fact He was going. Yet, they would not now ask. They had asked (13:36) and still did not understand the answer, so they were no longer asking.

Though they did not ask questions, yet there was sorrow in their hearts because of what He was saying and even greater sorrow lay ahead. They did not understand the fact that He had to leave. They did not want to be away from Him and had not expected that He would leave them. They had expected Him to stay and reign as an earthly king. The whole situation was confusing to them.

16:7-11 - Jesus had to leave, but promised to send the Holy Spirit

Despite their sadness, they needed to realize there were advantages that Jesus was leaving. One advantage is that this would bring about the coming of the Helper, the Holy Spirit (see 14:26; 15:26). Note that trials and troubling circumstances are often necessary in this life in order for blessings and benefits to come. Jesus then described

some things the Holy Spirit would do and how that would be advantageous to them.

The Spirit would convict the world. To convict (Gk. ελεγχω), per Vine and Thayer, means to refute or confute, to reprove or rebuke, involving shame to one who is guilty as his error is exposed or brought to light. So, the idea is to demonstrate, pronounce, or declare someone to be guilty (cf. John 3:20; 8:46). This compares to our English legal sense of “convict.” (Note that a man may be guilty and yet not be convicted or proved guilty. The Holy Spirit would prove the world to be guilty.) Jesus names three areas in which the world would be convicted.

They would be convicted regarding sin because they did not believe on Jesus. All people are guilty of sin (Rom. 3:8-23). Jesus is the only One who can grant them forgiveness. If they refuse to believe on Him, they have no hope of forgiveness, but must remain guilty. And they would commit the additional sin of refusing to believe.

How would the Spirit convict the world? This would be done through the message of the gospel that the Spirit would reveal through these apostles (2 Timothy 3:16-4:4). This is demonstrated by the sermon Peter preached by the guidance of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Many other such sermons followed.

The Spirit would also convict the world regarding righteousness, because Jesus was going to the Father. I am unsure here exactly what is meant. Perhaps after the world killed Jesus and He then left to go to the Father, then the world would be convicted that He was righteous and they had killed the righteous Son of God. The Spirit surely did do this through the apostles beginning on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2; 3:14,15; 7:52; 1 Peter 3:18).

Another possibility is that they would be convicted of their sins (v9) by the judgment of God (v11), which was a righteous judgment (v10). Cf. Acts 17:31. Both these ideas are true, but I am unsure which is meant.

The world would also be convicted regarding judgment in that the prince of the world has been judged. Satan is the prince of the world (see on 14:30). To convict or prove guilty the ruler of a kingdom is to convict all who accepted and obeyed the evil commands of that ruler. Jesus would defeat Satan in His death and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14,15). When the Spirit came, He would convict those who had followed the prince of the world and served Him, especially in killing Jesus. [Cf. 12:31; 3:19; 9:39; etc.]

16:12,13 - The Spirit would guide them into all truth, even telling things to come

Jesus knew that, until He had died and the Holy Spirit had come to explain His death and resurrection, the apostles just would not understand many things He might have told them. Consider how they

were already misunderstanding so many things He had told them. Despite all His efforts, they still thought He should be an earthly king, etc.

Many other things He could have expressed to them, but it would do no good because they were not ready to accept them. So, He gave them enough ahead of time to sustain them. Then they would know, when His predictions came true, that He had intended all these things to come to pass (vv 1ff). But He withheld for the time being other things that He knew they did not need and would not understand.

However, when the Holy Spirit came after Jesus had fulfilled the things He was predicting, then the apostles would be adequately prepared to understand the events that had transpired, because they could view them with hindsight. Then the Spirit would deliver the full explanation of even the things Jesus was then withholding.

The Spirit would tell them **all** truth. This does not mean He would tell them everything that God knows, of course. That could never be revealed or understood by us (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2). But the Spirit would tell all that man would need to know about God's will for our service to Him. He would give a complete revelation of how to be right with God and receive eternal life. Nothing we need to know about how to please God would be withheld. See 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; Eph. 3:3-5; cf. John 14:25,26; 1 Cor. 2:9-16.

The Spirit would speak this by revealing, not just His own ideas, but the ideas given Him. This means the points determined beforehand in the plan of God. This would include foretelling the future, an act of the Spirit which man cannot do (2 Peter 1:20,21). Nothing here denies that the Holy Spirit was involved in the planning and determining of what was to be revealed (see notes on vv 14,15 below).

Note that the consequence of this statement is that the original apostles would receive everything man needs to know to be saved and have eternal life. Jesus said the Spirit would guide **them** into all truth (note "you" – v13, and "to you" – vv 14,15). He is emphatic in repeating that those very men would receive it all.

They, of course, recorded this truth in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 1 Cor. 14:37). That is why we need no further revelations today (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jude 3). Their revelation was perfect (cf. James 1:22-25). We need nothing more. That is why revelation ceased after the gospel was written, and no new revelations are needed. There are no new revelations, because the apostles got it all.

If anyone claims we need further revelation today or that necessary truths are missing from the Bible, such a one is denying the words of Jesus Himself in this passage.

16:14,15 - The Spirit would glorify Jesus, revealing the message from the Father and Son

After Jesus had ascended, He was to be glorified. This was one thing the Spirit would do when He came. He did this, not just by speaking of the things Jesus did in His life, death, and resurrection, but also by speaking what the Son wanted said. He would give credit to the Son for the great things He did. This is similar to Jesus Himself who, when He was on earth, spoke the Father's will and glorified Him (7:16; 8:26; 12:49; 7:39; etc).

Jesus then makes clear that the things that would be revealed by the Holy Spirit would be the Father's will as well as Jesus' will. Rather than denying the Deity of the three Beings in the Godhead, Jesus here claimed that He Himself possessed all things that belonged to the Father. Such a claim can amount to nothing less than a claim to Deity. Who among men could truthfully claim that everything the Father has is also ours? (See also notes on 1:1-3; 20:28; etc.)

The things being revealed, and all things pertaining to the creation, were matters of mutual understanding and agreement among the three. What one believed, the others believed. What one controlled, the others controlled, etc. However, it seems that, whenever any one of them was working on earth, He in effect consulted with the others and revealed only what they said He should. The exact relationship between the three is one of the hidden things of God that I do not believe we will ever fully grasp here. However, it is enough to know they all possess Deity, all are in full agreement, and we must obey whatever any one of them says.

The end result of this is necessarily that the message spoken by the apostles and written in the New Testament must be the very message of God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is not the opinions of the apostles themselves. They only delivered the message given them by the Spirit. As a result, the message carries the full power of the wisdom of God Himself and must be respected as such. For other passages regarding the inspiration of Scripture, see 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; John 16:13; Matthew 10:19,20; Galatians 1:8-12; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Luke 10:16.

16:16-18 - Jesus repeats that they would soon no longer see Him, because He would go to the Father

Jesus here began the concluding thoughts of His final discourse to the apostles. He said that He was going to the Father, as He had repeatedly said He would (13:31-33). They would not see Him, then they would see Him. This seems to mean that He would be gone because He would die, then He would return awhile and they would see Him in His appearances after His resurrection. See v20 where He explained more

fully. This would precede His final going to the Father when they would not see Him any more at all.

The disciples, however, were very confused by His statements. They questioned among themselves what He meant by saying they would not see Him and then they would see Him. This was very confusing to them. This of course proves Jesus' point when He had said He had many things to say they would not understand (v12). They did not understand even what He did say!

This also demonstrates the problem many people - at times, all of us - have in understanding God's word. The disciples knew exactly what Jesus had said: they even repeated it verbatim. But they still did not understand the significance of it. Quoting Scripture and understanding it are two different things.

16:19,20 - Jesus explains His prediction that they would not see Him then would see Him

Though the disciples had simply raised questions among themselves and had said nothing to Jesus, yet He knew they were confused and wanted to understand. This is another demonstration of His supernatural ability to know people's thoughts. Knowing their thoughts, He brought the subject up and gave more details. They probably still did not really understand His explanation, but it still served His purpose of making predictions they would understand later.

He had said they would not see Him, then they would see Him. Here He explained that the disciples would weep and grieve, but the world would rejoice. However, later the disciples' sorrow would be turned to joy. Verse 22 explains this even further. Subsequent events help us today understand the point. Because He left them (by being crucified), they would have great grief (cf. Mark 16:10). But the world (Jews) would be glad to get rid of Him. They would gloat as victors over a defeated enemy. However, when He arose from the dead, the disciples' sorrow would turn to joy.

16:21,22 - Jesus illustrates this by a woman in the labor pains of birth

The process of childbearing is a common illustration in Scripture. Here Jesus uses it to express that, when a woman is in childbirth, the travail causes pain, sorrow, and suffering. But after the baby is born, she is so happy that she has given birth to a child that the memory of the pain seems dim by comparison.

Likewise, the disciples would have great sorrow because of Jesus' death. But when He arose and returned to them, they would have a joy no one could take from them. By killing Jesus, people would cause the pain and anguish they would endure. But Jesus' victory would be permanent, such that nothing people could do afterward could ever cause such pain again. Then the disciples would always know that Jesus was

the victor, and through Him they can be victorious. No one can take away this joy. This explains v20 and v16.

16:23,24 - In that day they would make requests of the Father in Jesus' name

“In that day” probably refers to the time after Jesus’ resurrection. It would begin with the period of joy following Jesus’ resurrection. But that joy, Jesus had said, no one could take from them. So, the reference in v23 appears to include the whole gospel age following the resurrection. This is the time in which we have joy because of His resurrection and we can make request of God (see also v26 and 14:20).

Before Jesus made this statement, the disciples had not asked the Father for things in Jesus’ name. But “in that day,” after Jesus’ resurrection, they could ask the Father in Jesus’ name and He would grant their requests. This would contribute to the fullness of the joy He had described.

“Ask” (Gk. ερωταω) generally means an inquiry or request, either for knowledge (v19) or for a favor or petition (see Vine).

The point seems to be that, while Jesus had been on earth, the disciples could go directly to Him to make requests for favors. But after He died and arose, they would ask the Father in Jesus’ name. He would make it possible for them to go to the Father with their requests. (See also 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:26ff; etc.). He would then be their mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

Note the implication that, whereas in the past they had made requests of Jesus, in the future they would ask the Father by Jesus’ authority. This appears to imply that prayer today should be addressed to the Father, rather than to Jesus. Jesus said, “**Until now** you have asked nothing **in my name**” They had made requests, but not in Jesus’ name. He had not yet become the mediator between God and man. They could address requests directly to Him while He was on the earth. But “**in that day** you will ask **Me** nothing.” After He had been raised and ascended to the Father, petitions would be addressed to the Father through Jesus as mediator. (Note v26 – “in that day you will ask in My name.”)

Jesus had said that, after He arose, their sorrow would be turned to joy no one could take from them. This joy included, He said here, that God would answer their prayers in Jesus’ name.

16:25 - Jesus had spoken in figurative language but would later speak more plainly

Jesus continued describing the differences His death and resurrection would make. In the past, He had spoken to them with figurative sayings; but in the future, He would tell them plainly about the Father, not speaking in figurative language.

“Figurative language” (NKJV & NASB) is translated “dark sayings” (ASV), “proverbs” (KJV, NASB footnote), “parables” (ASV footnote), “allegories” (Marshall). It is used in 2 Peter 2:22; John 10:6.

Jesus had understood the disciples’ misconceptions and preconceived ideas about the Messiah. He knew they would not understand His true purpose, even if He tried to explain it (v12). So, He had spoken in figurative language using parables, comparisons (“I am the vine...”, “I am the Good Shepherd...”), and other expressions that did not directly state the point but yet stirred their interest and taught concepts that they would understand later (cf. Matt. 13:10-17ff).

Later on, after the events had occurred and they had the benefit of hindsight, they would be willing to accept what He taught, so He would explain things more plainly. After His resurrection, for example, He explained to them about the prophecies He had fulfilled (Luke 24:25-27,44-46). When the Holy Spirit came, He would teach them all things (John 16:12,13). Hence, the Father’s will and plans, fulfilled in Jesus, would be explained. The result would be that the current confusion being experienced by the disciples (v16-19) would be cleared up.

“Figurative language” (Gk. παροιμια) - “...a byword, maxim, or problem. The word is sometimes spoken of as a parable, John 10:6, i.e., a figurative discourse...” (Vine)

“[A] saying out of the usual course or deviating from the usual manner of speaking ... any dark saying which shadows forth some didactic truth, esp. a symbolic or figurative saying...illustrated by the use of similes and comparisons; an allegory, i.e., extended and elaborate metaphor...” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer)

“Plainly” (Gk. παρρησια) - “freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech — Acts 4:13; John 7:13,26; 18:20; — openly, frankly, i.e., without concealment: Mark 8:32; John 11:14 — without ambiguity or circumlocution: John 10:24; without use of figures and comparisons: John 16:25,29; freely: Eph. 6:19; Acts 28:31; 2:29; 4:29” — Thayer

16:26,27 - In that day the Father would love them, because they loved and believed in Jesus

Jesus then returned to the idea of making requests in His name “in that day” (cf. vv 23,24). He said He was not talking about Himself praying to the Father for them. He does not here mean that He would **not** pray for us or intercede on our behalf. On the contrary, He had said He would pray for the Father to send the Holy Spirit (cf. Heb. 7:25). All of John 17 is a prayer for them (v9), though Jesus had not yet died at that point. Jesus simply means here that, though He would be praying for them, yet His prayers for them are not what He is talking about and emphasizing.

His point is that, when He referred to them asking the Father in His name (vv 23,24), He was teaching them to approach God in prayer

themselves. He did not want them to think He would make all the requests of the Father and there was nothing for them to do. He is trying to teach them what **they** should do in making request of the Father by Jesus' authority. "**You** will ask the Father..."

The reason they could ask the Father is that the Father also loves them (so, by implication, He is willing to hear their prayer) because of their love and trust in Jesus. Jesus loved the Father and could make request on their behalf, but that would not be enough. Because Jesus had died to be our mediator and make salvation possible, the disciples themselves would be able to go to God in prayer by His authority, and they should do so. The Father loved them and wanted it this way.

Perhaps the concept of priesthood is here implied. The Jews had certain priests who went to God on their behalf. They themselves could not go to God offering sacrifices, etc. Jesus is now our high priest, but we are all priests of God (1 Peter. 2:5,9). We can all offer sacrifices of praise and worship through Jesus (Heb. 13:15). We need not stand back thinking God is so great and awesome that we cannot approach Him. Because of what Jesus was about to do and because of God's love for us all, we would all be enabled to approach boldly to His throne (Heb. 4:14,15; etc.).

16:28 - Jesus repeats that He had come from the Father and would return to Him

Here Jesus stated as plainly as anywhere what He meant about going to the Father, leaving them, etc. He had come into the world from the Father and now He was leaving the world to go back to the Father. He had existed in eternity with the Father (John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5ff). Now it was time to go home.

Jesus made many such statements during His lifetime, especially as recorded by John. Such statements are a clear claim to supernatural existence. He existed before He came to earth, and was about to return from whence He came. He was no mere man.

16:29,30 - The disciples profess to understand Jesus' teaching

Probably Jesus had hurt the disciples' pride when He said in v25 that they did not understand His sayings. They were eager to assure Him that they did understand, so they said He was not now using figures of speech (cf. v25), but they understood Him. They claimed they did not need to ask further questions for Him to answer. They believed He had come from God.

They had, of course, just admitted all kinds of confusion among themselves (vv 17-19). Perhaps they thought His subsequent discussion had cleared the matter up, or perhaps they fooled themselves into thinking they understood because of their desire to please Him. They appeared a bit "defensive." In any case, events surrounding His cruci-

fixion show that they really had no idea what He meant, especially about going back to the Father (see on vv 31,32 below).

Their comment about Him “knowing all things” may refer to the fact He had read their hearts regarding the questions they had among themselves. However, the statement is true, as demonstrated in other passages. Jesus truly does have unlimited knowledge, like the Father. And this does give us evidence that He came from God. See Colossians 2:2,3; John 21:17; 2:24,25; Revelation 2:23. For further discussion of Jesus’ Deity, see notes on John 1:1.

16:31,32 - Jesus predicts the disciples’ desertion of Him

Jesus was not fooled by the disciples’ claims to understand and to believe. He knew what lay ahead and how they would react to His arrest and crucifixion. He asked them if they really did believe. Then he affirmed that they would all desert him and be scattered in the hour of difficulty before them. Yet the Father would be with Him so He would not be alone. When this occurred, it would demonstrate that He was right in saying they did not understand.

All this, of course, came true when He was arrested. They all forsook Him and fled, and He stood alone to face His enemies in His hour of greatest need. Not one disciple defended Him, despite their prior affirmations.

The comment that Jesus would not be alone, but the Father would be with Him, again shows He and His Father are two separate beings or individuals. If they were the same individual, and all He had was His Father, then He would be alone. See notes on John 8:13-18.

The Father stood with Jesus through most of the hardship when the disciples forsook Him. He sent an angel to comfort Jesus in the garden. He was with Jesus spiritually through the trials, etc. However, He did forsake Jesus on the cross, and this appeared to be the greatest hardship of all for Jesus.

16:33 - Jesus gives peace despite tribulation

Finally, Jesus restates the purpose for these final teachings He had given. He spoke so they might have peace. The world gives tribulation, but He gives cheer because He overcame the world. Cf. 15:11; 16:1; etc. He had told them what events to expect and what blessings He would send to help them. All this was to give them calm assurance so they would remain steadfast.

Although disciples today do not face the exact same problems the apostles faced when Jesus died, yet the world does cause us problems. They would face the hardship of knowing He had died and left them. We face other hardships, but the world is a place of trial and hardship (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12). Do not expect your reward here. This life is a time of trial, not of final reward. The reward comes after life.

Nevertheless, we have peace and cheer during the hardship, because we know Jesus was victorious and through Him we can do the same. We can have peace and good cheer, even in times of trial and tribulation. Trials should not cause us to despair and surely not to forsake our Lord. We must trust Him for peace and strength. See Rom. 8:31-39; 2 Cor. 2:14; Phil. 4:13; 1 Cor. 10:13; etc.

John 17

Chap. 17 - Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples

17:1 - Jesus prayed for the Father to glorify Him, that He might glorify the Father

Jesus had finished His final instructions to the apostles. The discussion is closed by a prayer Jesus prayed to the Father. Jesus was often in prayer, and it was surely appropriate that this final discussion with them on the night before His death should end with prayer.

He lifted up His eyes to heaven. Sometimes people prayed with heads bowed or even kneeling or prostrate. But on this occasion, Jesus looked up. The attitude of heart, not the physical position, is the essential point.

“The hour has come” surely refers to the time of His death. He knew it was coming. He had known it and announced it repeatedly to His disciples. All the plans of God throughout the ages centered around this “hour.” It was the hour that the prophets had predicted, the hour that Jesus had come to earth for, the hour that would make possible the salvation of all mankind. For Jesus, it was the hour of His greatest trial, His greatest humiliation, His most difficult task. He faced it with prayer.

He asked the Father to glorify Him, so He could glorify the Father. See on 13:31,32, where it is clear these expressions refer to the death of Jesus on the cross and the glory that resulted to Him and to the Father when He was raised from the dead (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus' death would seem a tragedy at the time. For Jesus, it would be an incredible shame, sorrow, and disgrace (Heb. 12:2,3): the greatest humiliation of His life. But He endured it because He knew the results that would follow. Mankind could be saved only in this way, and it would result in His glory as He arose. Then He would give glory to the Father and lead men to become right with Him. See v5 below for a greater description.

17:2 - The Father gave Jesus' authority so He could give men eternal life

Jesus had authority over all flesh (cf. Matt. 28:18). He had possessed Deity from the beginning, as the Creator of all (John 1:1-3; 20:28; Phil. 2:5ff). That would give Him inherent power over all. All people everywhere must obey Jesus' word. He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12). He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He pos-

sessed glory with the Father before the world began (v5). Note that He would have authority over all flesh: not just one nation (the Jews), but all people of all nations.

He had power to give eternal life to all who belonged to Him (see notes on 10:28; cf. 1 John 5:11,12). He is the way, the truth, and the life, the only way people can come to the Father (John 14:6). There is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). God gives eternal life through Him (Rom. 6:23).

In what sense did the Father “give” Jesus this power (cf. John 3:35)? The Father is, in some sense, higher than the Son (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28). Yet, to possess Deity would mean to have authority already over all created things. Perhaps it here refers only to the fact that the Son would be given power to grant eternal life. He already had power to rule the universe, but it was necessary for Him to die in order to have power to give eternal life according to God’s plan.

Another possibility is that, when Jesus came to earth to live as a man, He came as a man subject to the Father’s authority as a servant like men are (Phil. 2:5ff). While He was still Deity on earth, He was **acting** as a man to learn obedience. He was not exercising the full authority of Deity. At this point in His life, His period of subjection was almost over and He was about to return to full exercise of His authority, and this is expressed as the Father giving Him power. (See on v5.)

17:3 - True eternal life is to know the Father, the only true God, and to know Jesus whom the Father sent

Having mentioned eternal life (v2), Jesus proceeds to describe how men may receive it. To “know” here means to have a personal relationship of fellowship and harmony. Man in sin is alienated from God (Isa. 59:1f), and is an enemy of God. In that sense, he does not know God. He may know who God is, but does not personally have a relationship with Him. That comes only if we obey Him (1 John 2:3ff; see notes on 15:21; 16:3). Only if one “knows God,” in this sense of a personal relationship, can he have eternal life.

But note that eternal life does not come by loving the Father only. Jesus says plainly here that, to have eternal life, people must also know or have fellowship with Jesus Christ. What a claim! The clear implication is that people cannot have eternal life unless they recognize who Jesus is and have a relationship with Him! Consider the consequences for religions that fail to recognize Jesus and for even professed believers who do not serve Him properly. See on John 14:6.

By calling the Father, “the only true God,” Jesus did not exclude Himself from Deity. He is making a statement that cannot possibly be true unless He Himself possesses Deity. What mere man could claim that people must know Him, along with God the Father, in order to have eternal life! Such was clearly a claim to Deity; and other passages, even in John, clearly show that Jesus does possess Deity (see on v2

above). Calling the Father “the only true God” is just an affirmation that the Father possesses Deity, and there is only one true God. Hence, the Deity the Father possessed is the true Deity of the only God, just like Jesus Himself possessed. He and the Father are one (see on 17:20,21). (Some translations include Jesus here in the “only true God.”)

To illustrate, suppose I hold up a Bible and say, “This is the only true word of God.” I spoke the truth because the message is the only true message from God. But there are many other copies like it, and each of them can be called “the only true word of God.” The statement does not deny that other copies exist, but affirms that the nature of the message is unique, etc. A message that is **different** is not the true message. So, Jesus’ statement did not deny that other Beings possessed this unique Divine nature. But He was affirming that the nature of Deity was truly unique. “Gods” which are claimed to have Deity but which are **different** in nature, are not truly God. Jesus is not a different god, but the exact image of the Father (Heb. 1:1ff). Cf. Jude 4 where Jesus is called our only Master and Lord. Does this exclude the Father from being Master and Lord?

17:4,5 - Jesus glorified God by finishing His work, so He asked to return to the glory He had with the Father before the world began

Jesus on earth had given glory to the Father already by doing the Father’s will, obeying Him, teaching others about Him, and showing men how we ought to serve God. But there was a greater glory yet to come after Jesus died and arose (v1).

Jesus said He had finished the work the Father gave Him. This speaks of the work as a completed thing, though the last great deed was yet to be done. But to Jesus it was the same as done (cf. v11). Compare this to a ballgame where one team is so far ahead that the outcome is clearly determined. Even though the game is not yet completed, people say, “It’s over.” So, Jesus was totally committed to the task; nothing would stop the course of events now. Hence, it was as done. So, He reminds the Father that this should lead to His glory as they had planned.

See also how Jesus prepared Himself to endure the horror facing Him. He looked past the trauma to the glory that would follow. He was so settled in His mind that it was as though it was done, so He emphasized the positive good that would result. Difficult as it may be, we would benefit greatly by dealing with our problems this way as well.

Note that Jesus had glory with the Father before the world began. He was with the Father then, hence they are both eternal (1:1-3). And He had glory with the Father. They shared the same glory, so Jesus must have possessed Deity. What mere man could make such a claim as this? Having accomplished this work, He would return to that posi-

tion of glory. All men would honor Jesus even as they honor the Father (5:23). On earth, He had surrendered this glory, not claiming and exercising it (though He surely deserved it). Now that the work was complete, He would return to claim it again. Cf. Phil. 2:5-12. God absolutely refuses to allow anyone but Deity to have the glory of God (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). If Jesus had glory with the Father, then He must possess Deity.

And furthermore, note that the Father and Son are clearly here two separate individuals. There is an “I” and a “You.” Jesus said, “Glorify **Me** together with **Yourself**.” There was an individual whom Jesus calls “Me,” and an individual whom He calls “Yourself”: two separate individuals who were “together with” one another. And both possess Deity, since both share the same glory.

17:6-8 - Jesus had made the Father known to the disciples

Jesus had made known the Father’s name to men. The name stands for the person, His character, work, reputation, etc. Jesus had revealed the Father (1:18). By seeing Jesus’ life and hearing His teaching, we know what the Father is like (14:7-11; see also on 17:26).

He did this for the men who had belonged to the Father, but were given to Him by the Father. He had earlier said that He possessed all things that belonged to the Father (16:15), and He would soon repeat this (17:10). Again, He is not attributing Deity to the Father which He denies for Himself. On the contrary, who but Deity could properly claim that all God’s people belong to Him and He possesses all things that belong to the Father?

V10 continues to explain by showing that these people belong to both the Father and the Son. The Father had given Jesus the responsibility of caring for them on earth. This was the plan of God. Jesus would be the One to come and teach, then die on earth. The Father did not do this, but the Son did. Hence, the responsibility was put in the Son’s hand. This does not prove He was not Deity, for equals can give things to one another.

The result of Jesus’ work was to convince the disciples that what He taught was really from the Father. He was not a man making up doctrines of His own. His power was Divine and the message was from God. He was acting as a man, but He had Divine approval for all He said and did. This is the sense in which, as a man, He proved to the people that what He had was from God.

Not only did they know who Jesus was, but they kept the teachings from the Father that Jesus gave them. Of course, they often failed and would fail tragically before another day had passed. But they returned to the Lord and continued to seek His will to do it. Note that a proper relationship with God requires keeping His word, not just learning it or just believing it.

17:9,10 - Jesus prays for those whom the Father had given Him

Note that Jesus' prayer has turned from praying for Himself to praying for the apostles. He will eventually turn to praying for those who come to believe in Him through the apostles (v 21ff).

Jesus repeats, as in vv 4-8, that the disciples belonged to the Father but were given to Him. Note again that Jesus possesses all who belong to the Father (cf. 16:15). How could this be if He is not Deity? What mere man could rightly make such a claim?

However, Jesus added that this prayer was being offered for these who belonged to Himself and to the Father. He was not praying for the world. He had explained to the apostles how the world would treat them (15:18-21). He was praying for the disciples, knowing the hardships they would face in the world (see vv 14,15). Though He Himself was about to endure the hardships of the cross, yet His prayer was for the disciples.

This does not mean that Jesus did not love the world or that He never prayed for the world. It surely does not refer to the Calvinist concept that Jesus loves and cares for only the unconditionally elect and not for others. His point is only that, at this particular point, His prayer is for the disciples, not for the world. Many other Scriptures show that He does love the world (3:16). In fact, He did pray for the world before this prayer was over (vv 21,23). He bids His disciples to even pray for their enemies - Matthew 5:44. Why would He not pray for lost sinners for whom He was about to die?

17:11,12 - The plan to keep those who the Father had given to Jesus

Jesus was leaving the world (He was actually still in the world - v13 - but he speaks as if He was already not here, meaning that it is as sure to happen as if it is already accomplished - cf. v4). He had left heaven to come to the world to accomplish a purpose. Now His purpose here was accomplished (v4), so He was going back to the Father.

Yet, He was concerned for the apostles, because they would have to remain in the world facing the hardships that He knew were ahead of them. His prayer was that the Father would keep them and that they may be one as He and the Father were one (see vv 20,21 on this point). They had surely had difficulties with conflict and rivalries among them when Jesus was on earth. So, He prayed for their protection and unity in the work after He left them.

To keep them is to protect them. Jesus had kept (protected) them while He was on earth, so none of them was lost except the son of perdition (Judas), as the Scripture had predicted. This shows that "keeping" them means protecting them from being lost. In v15 He prayed the Father to "keep them" from the evil one.

The expression “son of perdition” implies that perdition or destruction was the destiny to which Judas’ nature would lead him. His loss was the fulfillment of Scripture, in that it had been predicted that one would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, etc. (Zechariah 11:12; Psalms 41:9; 109:8). It does not mean that Judas had no choice in the matter (see on 13:21-30).

Nothing here teaches “once saved, always saved,” as Judas’ case proves (see notes on 10:28,29). A person can fall because of disobedience or neglect of his own doing. Yet, we have the great promise that God does not want us lost and will work to keep us saved. He will not force us against our will to do right, but He will work against the outside forces of the “world” so they cannot overwhelm and compel us to be lost even as we strive diligently to do right (1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 4:13).

It is passages such as these that answer those who worry about, “What if I live a long, faithful life, and then in a moment of weakness I sin and get hit by a truck and die before I can repent?” I may not know how God works, but the clear teaching of verses such as this is that God is working for my good to see that such things do not happen. I do not need some elaborate theory to explain how He will prevent it. And I definitely should not concoct some explanation that denies the need for repentance and prayer when I sin, or worse yet that denies it is possible for a child of God to so sin as to be lost. I often do not understand **how** God achieves His purposes, but faith trusts Him to do right. I can put my faith in God that, if I am diligently striving to do right, He is not going to let me be lost over some matter which could easily have been resolved had I just had a few more hours to live.

17:13,14 - The world hates Jesus’ disciples, yet He spoke so they could have joy

Jesus’ instructions in chap. 14-16 were intended to give the disciples joy, despite the hardships they would face (15:11; 16:24). There is joy in serving Jesus and receiving the blessings He provides, but the disciples would face difficult circumstances that would threaten that joy. Jesus’ joy cheers us because of our relationship to Him, regardless of external circumstances and the treatment we receive from the world. See Matthew 13:44; 25:21,23; Luke 6:23; 10:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:6,8; 4:13.

The world had hated the apostles and would continue to do so, because Christians are different from the world like Jesus was (see 15:18-21). The world still hates God’s people today. But Jesus gave the word to guide and strengthen the apostles through these trying times. That same word can do the same for us today.

As on 15:18-21, the reason the world hates us is that we are different from the world. The upright lives of disciples constitute a rebuke against the sins of those who do not serve God, and our teaching shows

their error. If they are not willing to repent, they will resent us (cf. 3:19-21), just as they resented Jesus. This is what motivates persecution. Could it be that the world does not hate us, because we are not really different from the world as we ought to be?

17:15,16 - We are in the world, but not of the world

Jesus' prayed for the apostles, not that they would avoid the problems of the world by being removed from it, but that they would have the means to overcome the evil one. God would "keep them" from him (cf. vv 11,12). Even though we continue in the world, Jesus said we are not "of" the world like He was not. We should be in the world but not of the world.

He had already shown we are different from the world, so the world hates us (v14; cf. 15:18-21). The danger is that disciples living in the world may become like the world. We must resist that danger with all our power (Rom. 12:2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). The world in general is not serving God. As we become too attached to the things of the world, we may likewise become indifferent toward God's service. Peer pressure is a powerful force to lead us to the "evil one."

However, it is easy to become so angered and frustrated by the temptations and opposition we face that we seek to leave the world entirely. We wish to escape the pressures of the world by going off by ourselves in a monastery, convent, or commune with just people who share our religious views. Jesus did not pray this for the apostles, so we must not seek it for ourselves. We have a duty to fulfill in the world and that is to be an example of what God's people should be like. By our teaching and our lives, we should strive to lead the world to Jesus (Matt. 5:16; Mark 16:15,16; etc.). To do this, we must have contact with people of the world. Jesus Himself was criticized for associating with sinners, and He explained that He did it to bring them to repentance (Luke 5:29-32). So, Jesus sent us "into the world" (v18).

This does **not** mean, however, as some mistakenly claim, that we should make no efforts to protect ourselves from the world's temptations. The disciples did not leave the world, but there were definitely times when they would leave certain people and circumstances in order to escape persecution or temptation. They would often flee.

We are warned that evil companions corrupt good morals and we must avoid tempting circumstances (Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12). Some places, circumstances, and people place strong temptations on us, yet there is no good reason for us to be there. So, we ought to flee those circumstances and people, not to completely leave the world, but to maintain our spiritual integrity. This is especially true for children and new converts, since they lack spiritual maturity to deal with temptation. We are in a warfare with Satan, and armies should not put raw, untrained recruits on the front line. So, a family ought not

to totally isolate children from evil, but should protect them from it and gradually allow them to contact it as they are able to deal with it.

17:17-19 - Sanctification by the truth of God's word

Jesus repeated that He was sending the apostles into the world as the Father sent Him into the world (see notes on vv 15,16). But though they must be in the world, they should be sanctified by God's word, the truth, just as Jesus had sanctified Himself by the truth.

“Sanctify” means to be made holy or set apart for special purposes. Sanctification or holiness is a common theme in the Bible. Jesus here said that He had sanctified Himself. God is holy, and we should be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). A person who is sanctified or holy is a “saint,” so Christians are often called in the gospel (Acts 9:13; 1 Cor. 1:2; etc.).

To be holy we must keep ourselves pure from sin. Sin is what defiles our souls and ruins our relationship to God. To be set apart to Him, we must overcome sin (the world and the evil one) and must be cleansed of all sins we commit (Heb. 2:12).

This is done through the word. How? First, the word instructs us how to become sanctified by having our sins removed by Jesus' blood (1 Cor 6:11; Heb. 10:10,29; 13:12; Eph. 5:26). When we learn and obey the teachings of the gospel, Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin.

But it is not just a matter of being forgiven. One who is forgiven then belongs to God and must use his life for God (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 12:1,2; chap. 6). He is sanctified or set apart to God's service, dedicated to live obediently to God, different from the world. God's word tells us how to do this.

God's word is the truth that produces this sanctification. God's word is always true for God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Psalm 119:128,160; 19:7-11). Men often lie or are at least mistaken (Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4). God never lies and cannot be mistaken. Hence, His word is always true. But it is the truth that makes us free from sin (John 8:31-34). The Holy Spirit was to reveal to the apostles all truth from God (John 16:13). Hence, the word of God, revealed in the Scriptures, is the only completely reliable and sure guide for our spiritual lives. Only it is infallibly true and cannot be wrong.

So while Christians must not leave the world but continue to live in the world (vv 15,16), yet they are sanctified from the world in that they are cleansed from sin and dedicated to God's service, so they refuse to participate in the world's evils (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

“Sanctify” (ἁγιαζω) — “...render or declare sacred or holy, consecrate. Hence it denotes 1. to render or acknowledge to be venerable, to hallow ... 2. to separate from things profane and dedicate to God, to consecrate and so render inviolable ... 3. to purify ... a. to cleanse externally ... b. to purify by expiation, free from the guilt of sin ... c. to purify internally by reformation of soul...” — Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

17:20,21 – Jesus prays for unity of His disciples

Jesus continues His prayer, but now prays for a different group. He had prayed for Himself, then for the apostles. Now He prays, not just for them, but also for all who believe in Jesus through the teaching of the apostles.

His prayer was that His disciples should be one, even as He and His Father are one. This passage is of major importance regarding several Bible doctrines.

Jesus and His Father: one God but two separate individuals

Some people claim that Jesus and His Father are the same Being or individual. They argue this on the basis of passages that say Jesus and the Father are “one” (see notes on 10:30).

But Jesus here explained that He and His Father are one like His disciples should be “one.” How are we to be “one”? Do we all become **one and the same individual**: one living being? If the Father and Son are one individual, then all His disciples must become one individual – an impossibility! But if we are not all one individual, but the Father and Son are one **even as** we are one, then the Father and Son cannot be one individual. We remain separate individuals, but we are one in purpose, faith, goals, character, doctrine, practice, etc. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-20,25,27; Eph. 4:1-4; etc.).

So, this passage explains **how** the Father and Son are one. The inspired comparison is that there is **one God** or Godhead that consists of plural members, just as there is **one** church that consists of many members (see references below).

Further, the Father and Son are described as **“You” and “Me,”** clearly identifying two separate individuals. Further, Jesus (the “I”) addresses the “You” as His “Father.” An individual and his father make two individuals. They are also called **“we”** (v22): **plural** individuals. In many other passages the pronouns for Jesus and His Father imply plural individuals (“we,” “us,” “I and You,” “I am not alone,” etc.). See notes on 8:16-18 and on 1:1-3.

Statements affirming the oneness of God are intended to contrast to the plural gods as in heathen idol worship, not to deny there is a plurality of individuals in God. When contexts affirm that there is one God, they generally are not discussing the relationship of Father and Son, but are contrasting the true God to the plurality of different gods such as heathen idol worshipers embrace: gods having different character, authority in different areas of life or different areas of the earth, and often disagreeing and even warring among themselves in their beliefs, purposes, teachings, and their wills for men. We worship, not such gods as these, but a united, harmonious God with one will and

plan for us, yet consisting of three separate individuals: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father, Son, and disciples “in” one another

Jesus also here expressed His relationship with God by saying the Father was in Him and He in His Father. Yet, some again misunderstand.

Many other passages speak of separate persons being “*in*” one another. To say one is “in” the other does not prove they are the same individual. For example, Christians are “in Christ” and “in the Father”; and Father and Son abide “in” us — John 14:20,23; 15:4-7; 3:21; 6:56; Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-38; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 1:1; 3:8,9; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 5:14; 1 John 2:6,24; 3:24; 4:12-16. Do these verses prove that we are the same individual or personal being as the Son or the Father?

Note also that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians — 2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19. This concept really confuses many people. They somehow believe this must refer to a direct, personal inhabitation of our bodies by the Holy Spirit.

But again, John 17:20-23 explains the real meaning of the expression. For Jesus to be “in the Father,” and vice-versa, simply means for them to be “one.” “That they all may be **one**; as Thou, Father, art **in Me**, and **I in Thee**, that they also may be **one in us...**; that they may be **one**, even as **We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me**, that they may be made perfect in **one...**”

To say that one person is “in” another simply means that they have fellowship and unity: a close, harmonious, united relationship. It does not mean they are one individual. This is how the Father and Son were in one another, how they are in us and we are in them, and how the Holy Spirit is in us. See 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 1:5-7. (Compare John 1:18 — in the bosom of the Father.)

For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

The importance of unity

This passage is also a major plea of Jesus for unity among His disciples. He said this unity would help prove to the world that the Father sent Jesus.

Yet, those who claim to believe in Jesus are tragically divided. And incredibly, many people make arguments that would justify or prolong this division. They say, “It doesn’t matter what church you attend as long as you are sincere.” “One interpretation of the Bible is just as good as another.” “The grace of God will cover people of all faiths.” And

even, “Having different denominations is an advantage because people can find whatever group suits them.”

Yet, all this clearly contradicts the Jesus’ prayer for unity. In what sense are Jesus and His Father “one”? That is the sense in which He wanted us to be “one.” Do they argue and disagree about how to worship, what church to be a member of, how to be forgiven of sin, etc.? No, they have harmony about these things.

Many other Scriptures demand unity among God’s people, condemn division, and teach there is only one true church and one true faith: Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20; Jude 3. (See also Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14,16; 4:16; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; etc.)

Does this mean we should achieve harmony by overlooking contradictions and disagreements and just “loving one another so much” that doctrinal conflict does not matter? Is this how the Father and Son achieve unity? No, they achieved unity by both accepting and teaching the same things (John 12:49,50).

Many Scriptures teach us to stand for the truth and oppose error: Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4. When we do so, if there are people who do not accept the teaching (as will often happen), division will result. It often resulted when Jesus taught, as is shown in John (see 10:19 and notes and references on similar passages). But this is the fault, not of those who stand for the truth, but of those who reject truth. There will always be division between those who accept truth and those who do not. Jesus teaches unity on the basis of faithfulness to the will of the Father.

Other lessons

Further, note that we believe in Jesus through the word of the apostles (cf. John 20:30,31; Rom. 10:17). The word is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Scriptural faith does not come because God directly speaks to us or sends us a personal direct revelation. We believe through the testimony of the apostles (15:27), whose testimony is revealed today in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

17:22,23 - Jesus gives His disciples glory that they may be one

These verses continue from vv 20,21. Jesus adds that the result of this being one with the Father and Son will be that Jesus gives us the glory that the Father gave Him. The glory here is explained to be the glory of being one with them and having them in us. As Jesus received glory for His sacrifice to save us, so He gives us glory if we serve Him (Hebrews 2:9,10). This does not mean that we receive that special glory that belongs only to Deity, which Jesus had with the Father before the world began (v5). We should never be glorified as fully as God is glori-

fied. Yet, we can have the glory of spiritual unity and fellowship with the three Beings of Deity. That should be glory enough for anyone.

Further, because of this oneness, there is a special love God has for His people, even as He had for Jesus (see 14:21-24). As a result of our unity with God, the glory we receive will include an acknowledgement by the world that God sent Jesus and that God loves us just as surely as He loved Jesus. And He repeats that this unity would help the world believe in Him. It is sad, but true, that by causing division among those who claim to follow Jesus, Satan has significantly hindered the world's acceptance of Jesus as God's Son.

17:24 - Jesus offers us the joy of beholding His glory with the Father

Jesus had earlier said He was going to prepare a place that His disciples could come and be where He was (see notes on 14:1ff). He here prayed to the Father stating His desire for His disciples to be with Him where He was, that they could behold the glory the Father gave Him. He repeated that the Father loved Him before the foundation of the world.

This surely appears to discuss the eternal reward of the faithful disciples. He had said that He was going back to the Father, and there the Father would restore to Him the glory He had before the world began (vv 13,5). If so, then it must mean that our eternal reward will be a home in heaven in the presence of the Father and the Son. Heaven is surely where Jesus will be. If we are to "be with Him where He is," then we too must be in heaven. One of Jesus' final appeals, before His arrest and crucifixion, was that we could be with Him in eternity to see His glory. See also 1 Thess. 4:17; 5:9,10; Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 1:3,4.

17:25,26 - Jesus declared God's name, so we may share in God's love

Jesus concluded His prayer by repeating (as He had said various times earlier) that the world did not know the Father. Yet, Jesus knew the Father, and His disciples knew that God had sent Jesus.

Jesus' purpose here had been to declare the Father to the people (1:18). He said He had accomplished that declaration and would continue to declare it. The result would be that the disciples would have God's love in them, even as the Father had loved the Son. (See verses above.)

This concludes that last record we have of Jesus' message to His disciples and His prayer on their behalf before He died and gave Himself as our sacrifice. Surely, this last words should carry significance and meaning to us, so that we give them serious study.

John 18

John 18:1-11 - Jesus' Arrest

See also Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53

18:1,2 - Jesus and His disciples walk to the garden on the Mount of Olives

Jesus had finished His final admonition to His apostles and His prayer for them. The time of His arrest, trials, and death, was at hand. With His disciples He crossed the Brook Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem (see *map*). He entered a garden. Other accounts call this the Garden of Gethsemane (meaning “oil press”), and tell us it was on the Mount of Olives.

This was a place where Jesus and His disciples had often met, and Judas knew this. Having agreed to betray Jesus, Judas would no doubt expect to find Him in His usual places. So, this was one place where He would search.

Other accounts explain that the Passover was at hand and Jerusalem was crowded with multitudes that came for the feast. Many of these had demonstrated their favor toward Jesus in the triumphal entry. So, the Jewish leaders sought to arrest Jesus secretly to avoid causing a riot among the celebrants at the Passover. Judas' knowledge of Jesus' habits could help them accomplish this. See Matthew 26:5.

John does not tell us of the anguish of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had, however, added very useful information regarding Jesus' final instructions to the apostles and His prayer to God for them.

18:3 - The enemies come to arrest Jesus

Judas came with soldiers and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees for the purpose of arresting Jesus, as Jesus had predicted. They were armed with weapons (swords and clubs, according to other accounts), evidently expecting a fight. They also came with torches to help see in the darkness. Like the disciples, Jesus' enemies expected Him to try to be an earthly king by military might. They expected that He and/or His disciples would put up a stiff resistance.

To deal with any possible violence, they sent a large group, though we are not told how many. Mark calls it a great multitude (14:43). Besides the officers sent from the priests and Pharisees, there was a detachment of troops. This refers to a Roman cohort, usually consisting of several hundred men, though it is possible that only as much of the

group as could be spared was actually sent. Note that the Jews had apparently obtained the help of the Romans even at this point.

18:4-6 - Jesus identifies Himself to His enemies

Jesus knew what was happening and did not wait for the soldiers to attack. Nor did He seek to withdraw, as He had at previous attempts to capture Him. He now knew the time had come, so He went to His enemies and initiated the confrontation. He asked them whom they sought. When they said they sought Jesus of Nazareth, He identified Himself openly to them. His conduct, knowing their intent, shows that He gave Himself up willingly. Despite their intent, no one forced Him to give His life.

His captors then “drew back and fell to the ground.” The reason why they so reacted is not stated. Perhaps they drew back seeking shelter in preparation for battle they expected to ensue. As the front lines retreated, they may have run into those behind them in the dark, causing mass confusion and stumbling. Many of these people knew of Jesus’ miracles, so they may have feared He would even use miraculous powers to attack them (such as Elijah used when an attempt was made to arrest him in 2 Kings 1). Or perhaps they were so shocked by His openness, they stepped back not knowing how to react. Here was one who was clearly beyond their conception. He was so open and frank, yet they had come to capture and kill Him.

Other accounts add that Judas had a sign arranged with the Jews. The one whom he would kiss would be Jesus. Judas fulfilled his bargain, kissing Jesus as though in salutation. Doubtless, this was intended to avoid arousing suspicion among Jesus and His disciples, while still giving the necessary sign to the Jews to identify Jesus. Yet, the hypocrisy and deceit of the traitor is incredible. We are amazed that he could, with such two-faced audacity, betray the very one who had so kindly befriended him, taught him, and proved beyond doubt that He was from God (see notes on Judas’ agreement to betray Jesus). We have no doubt that Judas deserves to be the classic symbol of traitors and betrayers.

18:7-9 - Jesus seeks the freedom of His disciples

Since the Jews had fallen back and done nothing, Jesus again asked whom they were seeking. He then told them a second time that He was the One they were seeking.

Then He requested that the disciples be let go. He was the one who was wanted by the authorities. They had no reason to seize the disciples. And Jesus’ death was all that was needed to fulfill God’s plan for a sacrifice for sin. So, Jesus sought the freedom of the disciples, thereby fulfilling His prophecy of John 17:12 that none of them would perish.

18:10,11 - Peter strikes the high priest's servant

The disciples by this time had gathered before Jesus' enemies and apparently thought that the time had come to fight to protect Jesus (cf. Luke 22:49). One of them drew his sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. John adds details that no other account includes: the disciple who did this was Peter, the servant was named Malchus, and the ear was his right ear.

The disciples had thought all along it would come to a military fight. Peter had valiantly affirmed His willingness to give his life for Jesus. He was here acting quite boldly by human standards, keeping His commitment. Commentators observe that it is not likely that Peter meant to cut off the man's ear. More likely, he was aiming for the man's head but missed, perhaps because the man dodged the blow.

Incredibly, however, from the disciples' viewpoint, Jesus did not urge on the fight, let alone take a lead in it. Quite the contrary, He rebuked Peter telling him to put up his sword. Then He healed the one who had been wounded (Luke 22:51).

This is amazing, first in that Jesus did a great miracle in the very presence of His enemies. Some modern "faith healers" claim they cannot do miracles in the presence of those who lack faith in their power. Those with true miracle power had no such hindrance. Yet, despite this evidence that Jesus was from God, the Jews continued in their determination to arrest and kill Jesus. If they had hearts to receive the truth, they would have changed long before this. The miracle, however, further demonstrates how inexcusable their conduct was.

According to other accounts, Jesus explained that there was no need for anyone to use physical force to defend Him. If needed, all He had to do was to ask and, instead of 12 disciples to defend Him (11 not counting Judas), He would have 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53).

Then Jesus explained why He did not use any power to oppose His arrest. The things about to happen were a fulfillment of God's purpose (and of prophecy — Matt. 26:56). It was the "cup" the Father had given Him to drink (cf. Matt. 26:39). This was the Father's plan. Whether they liked it or not, this was the way it was supposed to happen; otherwise, He would have used the force available to Him to stop it.

He had been telling them for a long time this was going to happen, and had told them again just a few days earlier. They should have had faith enough to follow His lead. If He was not resisting, they should have known that His way was best, and they too should not have resisted.

Other accounts show that the disciples then forsook Jesus and fled. This also fulfilled prophecy, for Jesus had just predicted this just a few hours earlier (John 16:32; etc.)! The disciples, especially Peter, had denied they would forsake Him, yet almost immediately they did exactly what He had said they would do.

Again, the main reason for their conduct was a lack of understanding. His plan was not their plan. When He did not resist, and even rebuked them for their attempts to resist, He completely contradicted their expectations. Had He fought, they would probably have fought with Him, for that is what they expected to happen. When He refused to fight and allowed Himself to be taken, they lost their faith and their nerve and left in confusion and uncertainty. The shepherd was in the process of being smitten, and the sheep were being scattered.

King argues that the fact Peter was carrying a sword, after three years of hearing Jesus' teaching, leads to a safe conclusion that Jesus was not opposed to the use of physical violence for personal protection. However, I see no evidence here for such a "safe conclusion," at least not as regards our conduct today. There is no indication the disciples had carried swords before this time, so Jesus may have had no occasion to discuss the matter earlier. Peter used the sword in a way that clearly shows He and the other disciples expected to use force to make Jesus a king; so the fact he carried the sword at all is just part of the disciples' overall confusion about Jesus' teaching. And above all, we must remember that the Old Testament law was still in effect. I know of no one who denies that God allowed the use of physical force under the old law. Personally, I see no evidence here one way or the other regarding use of physical force under the gospel.

18:12-19:16 - Jesus' Trials

Here begins a series of trials of Jesus, first before the Jews, then before the Romans. They may be summarized as follows:

Trials before Jewish authorities:

Before Annas

Before Caiaphas and the council

"Official" trial before the council

Trials before Roman authorities:

Before Pilate (first hearing)

Before Herod

Before Pilate (second hearing)

18:12-24 - The Jewish trial before Annas

Cf. Matt. 26:57-68; cf. Mark 14:53-65; John 18:12f, 19-24.

When considering the "trials" before the Jews, we should remember that, at every point, these are not "trials" in the normal sense of the word. They were more like consultations of Jesus' prosecutors. As such, they were thoroughly illegal, since these men were responsible to give fair treatment to those accused of illegal conduct.

They were illegal primarily in their purpose. The purpose of a trial is supposed to be to determine whether or not a man is guilty of a crime and therefore worthy of punishment. Evidence should be presented from both the accusers and the accused and then a verdict reached based on the evidence. Such was never the slightest intention of those who conducted these “trials.”

They did not hold these trials to find out whether or not Jesus was guilty of anything or to determine whether or not He should be killed. They had already decided all these things in their own minds long before they arrested Him — See Matt. 21:46; 26:3-5; 12:14; John 7:1,19,25,30,32,44; 8:37,40,59; 10:31,39; 11:45-53,57; 12:10,11; 5:18; Mark 14:10ff; etc. The reason for the trial was the Jewish leaders’ jealousy of Jesus and their rebellion against His teaching (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10; 11:18; John 11:47,48; 12:11,19,42,43; 7:32).

There was absolutely no possibility that these trials occurred so the leaders could find out whether or not Jesus had done anything wrong. They had questioned Him publicly and privately for months and could never prove Him wrong about anything. They could not even disprove His teaching, let alone prove Him guilty of a crime (John 8:46; Matt. 22:46). There was absolutely no evidence to even arrest Him, let alone convict Him in trial.

Hence, the purpose of the trial was not to determine whether or not Jesus was guilty. The verdict had already been reached without evidence. They considered Him guilty and had determined to kill Him. The purpose of the trial was to find a formal accusation: the **charge** or grounds that they would use to kill Him. His fate had been decided. The only issue that remained was what **excuse** they would use to rationalize what they had already determined to accomplish! “The verdict is ‘Guilty!’ Now, what’s the accusation?”

Since the Romans were in power, it was unlawful for the Jews to kill a man on their own (John 18:31). They needed grounds that would convince the Roman authorities that Jesus was worthy of death. They likewise needed grounds that would satisfy the people so they would not turn against the Jewish leaders. Certainly, they could not use their **real** reasons: that they were jealous and angry that Jesus had repeatedly proved them wrong. They probably were not honest enough to admit that reason even to themselves. And that reason made them look bad, instead of making Jesus look bad. They needed some charge, whether true or not, that could be made to look plausible as a reason for Jesus to be killed.

All this means that the trial began for an entirely illegal, immoral, evil, and hypocritical reason. It was therefore doomed from the beginning to be filled with hosts of other illegalities and miscarriages of justice. We will see as we proceed that this is exactly what happened.

It is amazing to see the power that hypocritical self-will can have in human minds. These men were incredibly picky in insisting that the letter of the law must be followed in minute detail (Matt. 15:1ff). Yet, here they did not hesitate to totally abandon all semblance of obedience to the law in order to murder a man, and a known prophet at that!

18:12-14 - Jesus was led first to Annas

The troops arrested Jesus and bound Him. They first took Him to Annas who, we are told was father-in-law to Caiaphas, the high priest.

V19 calls Annas the high priest. History records that Annas had been high priest before Caiaphas, and was still honored and had the influence of that office. It was also common for Romans to change the high priests, contrary to Jewish law. Perhaps the Jews still considered Annas to be high priest, though officially the Romans had put Caiaphas in that position (cf. Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6). Hally notes that these men had become wealthy from the booths in the temple that Jesus had overthrown (*Handbook*, p. 480). This would also prejudice them against Jesus.

(Note that some texts place v24 here in the text and infer that vv 14-23 actually occur while Jesus was before Caiaphas — see Clark.)

Caiaphas was the one who had prophesied that Jesus would die for all the people (though Caiaphas himself did not understand the significance of what he said — 11:50). This reminds us that these men had already reached a verdict regarding Jesus before the trial even began. The high priest himself had already stated that Jesus should die, long before He had even been arrested!

18:15,16 - Peter and John enter the courtyard of the high priest

Having been rebuked for his attempt to defend Jesus, and having fled with the other disciples when Jesus' enemies arrested Him, Peter nevertheless followed at a distance to see what would happen. In a way, Peter is obviously wrong here. He had said He would never stumble at Jesus, and would even die before turning from Him, yet here he had fled and refused to stay with Jesus in His greatest time of need.

Peter eventually entered the courtyard of the high priest. This was perhaps the same place where the later trial before Caiaphas occurred (v24). Perhaps the courtyard surrounded a house or even several houses where the high priest lived. Annas apparently had an interview with Jesus first, perhaps while waiting for the whole Sanhedrin to arrive. Then he sent Jesus to Caiaphas (v24).

There was another disciple also present (probably John, since he does not name himself). This disciple gained access to the area where the trial was occurring because he knew the high priest. He then ar-

ranged for Peter to be let into the courtyard. This set the stage for Peter's denials, which are recorded in subsequent verses.

18:17,18 - Peter's first denial

John records the first of Peter's denials at this time (other accounts wait and tell the whole story of the denials later, but no doubt they occurred from time to time during the trials as John describes them).

According to other accounts, as Peter sat in the courtyard, a servant girl said he was with Jesus. Peter denied saying he did not know what she was talking about. This is the first of the three times Peter would deny Christ, according to Jesus' prediction.

John says this occurred toward the beginning of the trial, and adds that the maid was the doorkeeper. Luke adds that Peter was warming himself with others at a fire and the girl saw him in the firelight and this helped her identify him. When we warm ourselves at the fires of our Lord's enemies instead of standing with Him, we have already denied Him by actions. Denial in words is sure to follow.

18:19-21 - Jesus refuses to give Annas information about His teaching

Annas asked Jesus about His disciples. Perhaps he was still concerned about a rebellion caused by the disciples. He also asked Jesus about His doctrine. It is obvious from the context that he hoped Jesus would incriminate Himself.

Jesus responded that His teaching had been done publicly in public places. Perhaps He said this because Annas' question implied some secret plot with the disciples. In any case, Jesus had nothing new to tell them. They already knew His teaching and had no valid reason for asking Him about it. Their only possible motive would be to hear something they could use against Him. He simply referred the high priest to the people who heard His teaching. Note that, unlike some secretive religious organizations, Jesus' public teaching revealed His true doctrine. He did not hide His teaching behind a cloak of secrecy. He taught nothing "in secret," but taught "openly to the world."

Jesus was here following His legal rights and, in so doing, pointing out the high priest's hypocrisy. This trial was illegal and both Jesus and the high priest knew it. Jesus was required to answer nothing, and surely was not required to provide evidence against Himself. The high priest and his followers knew what Jesus had taught. If there was error in it, they should have called witnesses and produced the proof according to legal precedent, instead of trying to get Jesus to provide it for them!

However, the high priest also knew that no one had been able to convict Jesus of error in His public preaching. He had defeated them

every time, so there was no sense trying to use that to convict Jesus. Instead, he was “fishing” for something to use.

Annas was acting as though Jesus was on trial for His teaching, but Annas and Jesus both knew what had been taught and knew it could not be proved wrong. There was no reason for Jesus to discuss it. This was not the real reason for the arrest and trial.

18:22,23 - An officer struck Jesus, but He called for evidence that He had done wrong

For His statement, Jesus was struck by one of the officers who stood by Him. He implied Jesus had no right to so answer the high priest.

However, Jesus had said nothing disrespectful to the high priest’s office (cf. Acts 23:2-5). He had made a calm statement of truth and legal fact, which was completely appropriate and within His rights. If He had taught error, proper legal procedure required them to produce the proof. If they could not produce it, they had no right to strike Him for expressing His legal rights.

The statement Jesus had made would bother no one unless they knew that He was right and they were being frustrated in their efforts to convict Him. Surely, prisoners had the right to state that they were not being treated in harmony with the law. People who cannot defend their religious views with proof are generally the ones who result to physical violence and persecution against those who convict them of error.

18:24-27 - The Trial Before Caiaphas

18:24 - Jesus was then sent to Caiaphas

Jesus’ interview before Annas was evidently ended, so He was sent to Caiaphas. Here the council of elders and scribes gathered. This is the Sanhedrin council (a term based on the Greek name — v59), the highest Jewish tribunal or political body. It was made up of 70 men from the following groups: “chief priests,” which were past and present high priests and their families; “scribes,” who were Pharisee lawyers and copyists; and “elders,” who were heads of the various Jewish tribes. The high priest was president of the council.

John gives virtually no details regarding this trial, but other accounts go into great detail. We will summarize the high points from the other accounts.

False witnesses came and accused Jesus of saying that He could destroy the temple in three days. This referred to Jesus’ statement as recorded in John 2:19, though they did not quote it properly and they surely perverted His intent. He did not say He could destroy the temple, but that they would do it. And His meaning was a reference to the temple of His body — that they would kill Him, but He would be

raised after three days (John 2:21,22). Mark 14:56,59 adds that the testimony of the witnesses, including even this testimony, did not convict Jesus because the witnesses could not agree among themselves.

The high priest then began to question Jesus, obviously with the hope that he could lead Jesus to say something they could use against Him. But Jesus made no response. Luke 22:67,68 partly explains why. First of all, it was obvious what their intent was. Nothing He could say would convince them He was innocent. And if He spoke to ask them a question, they would have no answers (or wouldn't answer honestly). They had never been able to answer in the past, so why would they now?

Besides why did He need to say anything? Their witnesses were getting nowhere even without His rebuttal. Furthermore, He knew what the outcome had to be and that nothing could stop it. He was unwilling to attempt to stop it.

The high priest then used his authority as priest and adjured Jesus by the living God to tell if He was the Christ, the Son of God. To "adjure" meant to call upon someone to speak under oath, to swear. (See Vine and Thayer on ἐξορκίζω. Cf. Gen. 24:3; Judges 17:2; 1 Kings 22:16; cf. related words in Gen. 24:29; 47:29; Mark 5:7; Acts 19:13; 1 Thess. 5:27; Neh. 13:25.)

Hence, Jesus said: "Thou hast said." This is obviously a form of consent (cf. Mark 14:62). This is how they interpreted it (v65). Hence, the NKJV translated "It is as you said."

The high priest then said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy — i.e., He had claimed for Himself that which belonged only to God. The rest of the council agreed and pronounced their sentence: "He is worthy of death." Conveniently, the verdict just happened to be exactly what they had intended from the beginning! Such a magnanimous sense of justice!

Note the devious method the council took to get their desired conviction. They proclaimed Him worthy of death for blasphemy. Why? Because He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, when He wasn't. But how did they know He wasn't? This was the very point they should have been there to consider. It was the only really pertinent point. They ignored the fact they had no evidence that His claims were blasphemous, ignored the evidence that He was truly sent from God (His miracles), found Him guilty, and condemned Him to death.

18:25-27 - Peter's second and third denials

John here returns to discuss Peter's denials. As Peter warmed himself at the fire (v18), it was again said that Peter was with Jesus. This time Peter took an oath (according to other accounts) saying he did not know Jesus.

There are some questions in harmonizing the accounts here. Some translations add that it was another "girl" (or maid) that made the

statement. But Peter's reply in Luke's account is, "Man, I am not..." The translators added the word "girl" or "maid," but this is based on the fact that the word for "another" is feminine. Mark's account says "the maid" saw him, perhaps indicating the same one as before. John says, "They said..." to him.

The explanation probably is something to the effect that several people joined in the accusation. Note that several accounts say one person said it to others who were there. Probably all these things happened. A maid said it, perhaps the same one as before. Then others took up the accusation, including another maid and a man or men. Finally, Peter denied it.

In any case, there is no contradiction. Jesus prophesied, and the Scriptures record, three denials. The number of accusations or accusers is not stated. The answers given by Peter are either indirect quotations or they were all stated in Peter's denial.

The third denial came as a result of accusations from several people. They said Peter must be one of Jesus' followers, for his speech betrayed him — i.e., He was a Galilean like Jesus (Mark 14:70). John adds that a servant of the high priest, a relative of Malchus, joined the accusations thinking he remembered seeing Peter in the garden.

Peter again denied and other accounts add it was done with cursing and swearing. Like worldly people do, and like he himself used to do before he became a follower of Jesus, he put himself under threat of punishment if he was not speaking truth. Of course, as is often the case, it was a false oath.

Immediately, even as Peter was speaking, the cock crowed (Matt. 26:74; cf. Luke 22:60). This reminded Peter that Jesus had said he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Luke's account adds that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Evidently at this time Peter was where he and Jesus could see one another. No doubt, Jesus' look also served to remind Peter of Jesus' prediction that he would deny Him.

Realizing his guilt and fulfillment of Jesus' prediction, Peter went out and wept bitterly. No doubt, he wept in guilt over what he had done, but probably also in sorrow over the whole turn of events. His Lord whom He had loved and trusted was now being condemned to death, the very thing Peter had confidently affirmed would never happen to Him. Peter is confused because, in his willful stubbornness he refused to believe any of this would happen. It just was not what he expected. Plus on top of it all, he himself had failed miserably, even after the Lord had warned him he would do it and he himself had said he would never do it.

On the other hand, this is not the end of the story. Judas betrayed Jesus for money, and Peter denied him three times out of fear and confusion. Judas reacted to his guilt by killing himself. But Peter reacted

with genuine remorse, and after Jesus' resurrection he understood what all this really meant. Then Peter became a firm disciple and preached the gospel without compromise to these very same people who killed Jesus. Here he denied Jesus before just a few people; but later he publicly accused a huge multitude of having killing the Son of God, and as a result thousands were converted.

John 18:28-40 - Jesus' Trial before Pilate (first hearing)

Cf. Matt. 27:11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7.

18:28-30 - The Jewish leaders take Jesus before Pilate for trial

Other accounts show that the Sanhedrin met early in the morning to declare an official determination of Jesus' guilt. This was simply a ratification of the verdict they had reached in the night trials. Then they took Jesus to Pilate.

Pilate was the Roman governor at that time. The Jews would doubtless have killed Jesus themselves had they thought it was expedient to do so. However, since they were subject to Roman law, they had to have approval from the Romans to execute anyone (see v31). I suspect they were also hoping to convince the Romans to do their dirty work here, to avoid upsetting the multitudes or provoking them to a riot. If the Romans killed Jesus, the Jews could blame them for it, and they would be responsible to deal with any fallout from the people.

The Jews, however, would not enter the judgment hall or palace (Praetorium) of Pilate. They feared they would become defiled and could not eat the Passover feast. Johnson points out that no Jew could enter a house that had leaven in it during the Passover, which eliminated entering Gentile houses since they would not respect such a rule (King suggests a different reason why defilement might occur). Note how carefully these Jews followed such external religious details, refusing to risk ceremonial uncleanness during the Passover; yet they had no scruples against condemning an innocent man to death by means of a whole series of illegalities!

Since the Jews would not come in, Pilate went out to them and asked what accusation they had against Jesus. The Jews seemed to think that the very fact they brought Jesus ought to be enough to bring a condemnation! Don't question us. If we say he's guilty, he is! Apparently, they hoped Pilate would take their word for the matter and accept their verdict without examining the evidence.

Luke's account names numerous specific accusations the Jews eventually made against Jesus, none of them being the accusation on which they themselves had condemned Jesus to be worthy of death. They knew Pilate would not care whether or not Jesus had claimed to

be the Son of God. That was a violation, in their view, of religious law, but Pilate would not condemn a man for it.

They needed some accusation that would appear to Pilate to be a threat against the Roman government. They brought up such claims as forbidding tribute to Caesar. Never mind that they had specifically asked Jesus about this and He had said just the opposite. They also accused Him of being a rabble-rouser stirring up the people, which also had never happened.

18:31,32 - Pilate tells the Jews to judge Jesus themselves

Pilate obviously did not want to judge the case. He sought various means, recorded in the various accounts, to get the people to accept responsibility for the matter or even to persuade them to let Jesus go or give Him a lesser penalty. One thing he tried was to get the people to judge Jesus by their own law. He may have known they could not or would not do this, but he sought to remove himself from responsibility and place it on the Jews where it belonged.

The Jews did not accept this, however, because they were determined to kill Jesus and they could not do so under Roman law (cf. Matt. 27:2). The fact is that they did sometimes kill people, but this violated Roman law (Acts 7). Perhaps Jesus was so popular they were afraid to kill Him themselves. They had worked hard just to arrest Him without losing face before the people. I suspect that they hoped the Romans would do their dirty work and take the blame, so they themselves would not look so bad before the people.

The fact that the Romans must kill Jesus, however, became important in that it fulfilled the prophecies about how Jesus would die. Prophecy had predicted He would be hung and crucified by Gentiles (John 12:32; 3:14; 8:28; Matt. 20:18,19; 26:2; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32). Jews killed by stoning rather than crucifying, so the method of killing would be determined by who did it. The prophecies predicted, in effect, that the Romans would do it. By insisting that Pilate deal with the case, the Jews were once again unwittingly fulfilling prophecy and thereby proving Jesus to be the very One whom they denied Him to be: the Christ, the Son of God.

18:33-35 - Pilate questions Jesus about His claim to be a king

The Jews eventually accused Jesus of claiming to be a king (see Luke 23:2,3; Matt. 27:11). This would, if true, be of concern to the Romans, since it would appear to make Jesus in competition with or rebellion against Caesar. The Jews, of course, thought this is exactly what the Messiah would be; hence, if He had taught this, He would have only been saying what they themselves hoped the Messiah would do! And they also knew that, in truth, Jesus had done nothing to ever im-

ply rebellion against Rome. He had even told the people to pay the tribute money Rome demanded (Matthew 22:15-22).

Pilate questioned Jesus about this accusation and Jesus in turned asked the source of the accusation: Was it Pilate's idea or did He hear it from someone else? Jesus was probably trying to distinguish fact from rumor. Had Pilate observed some evidence that led him to think Jesus held this view, or was this just a rumor from the Jews? Of course, Jesus knew which it was. His question was intended to point out to Pilate that there was no proof of any conspiracy on His part against Rome. It would also question the Jews' motives, since if the charge was true, they would not be likely to tell the Romans except from some ulterior motives. They were surely no friends of Roman rule, but would generally have been glad if a leader had overthrown Roman rule.

Pilate responded that he was not a Jew. Perhaps he meant this to imply that, as a Roman, not a Jew, he knew the Jewish hatred for Rome. He said that Jesus' own people had turned Him over to Pilate and made accusations against Him. This might be intended to acknowledge that it was just an accusation and perhaps unfounded. In any case, Pilate was acknowledging that neither he nor the Romans had any proof against Jesus. Yet, he asked what Jesus had done to cause such animosity. Pilate seemed willing to hear Jesus' side (unlike the Jews), yet he was surely confused by the fact these claims were being made. He thought surely there was some cause for all this.

18:36 - Jesus' kingdom is not of this world

Jesus explained to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world; hence, it was not in competition with Caesar and the Romans had no reason to fear Jesus. His disciples had no intention to fight Rome or the Jews.

This answer was important, not just for Pilate to understand, but also for Jews, for modern Christians, and for premillennial folks. Jesus had never come to be an earthly king like David, conquering enemies by physical force and ruling a civil government. The Jewish rejection of Him had not forced a change in His plans, as premillennialists often teach. He never intended to be such a king (cf. 6:15; Luke 17:21; Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17).

The proof He offered is that He had refused to allow His servants to fight. They wanted to do so, but He had rebuked them for it. What earthly monarch, intending to take a government by force, would insist that his servants stand idly by while his enemies captured him? Would Jesus have so acted if He intended to use force to establish an earthly kingdom? The Jews expected Him to use such force, and modern premillennialists still expect it. But it did not happen and will not happen, because that is not the nature of the kingdom!

This passage is fundamental to our understanding of Jesus' kingdom and kingship. He did not establish an earthly kingdom when He came to earth, not because He could not, but because He never intended to do so. Nor will He establish such an earthly kingdom when He comes again. Premillennialists are as wrong about this as the first-century Jews were. See the next verse for further discussion.

18:37 - Pilate then repeated his question and asked if Jesus was a king

Asked about His kingly authority again, Jesus answered, "Thou sayest" or "It is as you say." This was a claim that the statement was true (cf. notes on the Jewish trial, see Luke 23:3; Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; 1 Tim. 6:12,13). The NKJV gives the correct sense: "You say rightly that I am a king.

Jesus then explained more about the nature of His monarchy. He was born into the world to be a king. He did not deny this. But His authority was not that of physical force but of spiritual truth. He came to bear witness to truth, and all who respect truth would hear and obey Him.

His followers were not an earthly nation. He used the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, to make voluntary converts. All those who respected truth and sought to be right with God would accept His word and follow Him.

Note the serious consequences of this both to Judaism (ancient and modern) and premillennialism. Both are even yet expecting the Messiah to come to earth and reign over an earthly kingdom, the very thing Jesus here denied. Their doctrine denies Jesus is now king and that the church is His kingdom, doctrines which are repeatedly taught elsewhere.

Jesus will not begin to reign when He returns. He is now king: Matthew 2:2; 28:18-20; Psalm 110:1-4; Zechariah 6:12,13; Acts 2:30-36; Ephesians 1:20-23; Hebrews 1:3-9,13; 6:20; 7:1; 8:1; 10:12,13; Revelation 1:5. The kingdom now exists and is the church: Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9. The kingdom is spiritual in nature: Luke 17:20,21; Psalm 110:1-4; John 18:36; Romans 14:17; John 3:3-7; 6:15,27,63. To deny these truths is to teach fundamental error against Jesus' character and authority.

For further discussion of Jesus' kingdom and premillennialism, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

18:38 - Since Jesus had emphasized truth, Pilate asked, "What is truth?"

This appears to be a question of skepticism and agnosticism. There is no evidence that Pilate asked because he wanted an answer. Instead, He appeared to be making a point. He apparently did not believe anyone could know what the truth is. Many people today hold the same view and criticize anyone who appears to believe they know the truth in spiritual matters. Those who hold that view should realize they stand with Pilate, not with Jesus.

Pilate had, however, heard enough to know Jesus was not dangerous to Rome. In fact, the Jews had proved nothing against Jesus. So, Pilate plainly told the Jews, "I find no fault in Him at all." This is just one of several times he stated this verdict. In fact, no evidence was ever produced to prove Jesus was guilty of wrongdoing, let alone worthy of death. The one responsible for judging Him declared Him innocent. Whatever the final sentence may have been, the verdict was "Not guilty!" It necessarily follows that, in killing Jesus, Pilate deliberately chose to kill a man whom he knew and had declared to be innocent. He also gave the Jews fair warning that they were seeking the death of one who did not in any way deserve such a penalty.

18:39,40 - Barabbas is released instead of Jesus

Cf. Matthew 27:15-17. There was a custom at the feast for the governor to release some prisoner whoever the people wanted released. This custom was known both to the people and the governor. (Luke says the people actually asked for this custom to be honored by the governor.) The purpose of the custom, one would suppose, was a means whereby the governor could attempt to please the people and gain their favor.

Pilate offered the people a choice to have Jesus released or else a notorious man named Barabbas. Mark says Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder (15:7). John adds that he was a robber.

Note that, when the Jews asked for this man to be released, they asked for a man who was guilty of all the evil deeds for which the Jews had falsely accused Jesus and even more! He really was guilty of rebelling against Caesar, etc. Yet, they asked for him to be released and called for the death of Jesus, whom they could prove guilty of none of these things! Their hypocrisy is again incredible. If they really believed Jesus was guilty of claiming to be a king and rebelling against Caesar, and if they really objected to these things, then why ask for the release of one whom they knew to be guilty of all these? This act of itself proves beyond doubt that all their accusations against Jesus before Pilate were deceit and whitewash. They had other reasons for wanting Jesus dead, and Pilate was not fooled.

It appears that Pilate wanted to release Jesus instead of Barabbas, because he knew Jesus was innocent but Barabbas was guilty. Yet the people chose Barabbas.

John 19

19:1-15 - The Scourging and Further Hearing before Pilate

19:1 - Pilate has Jesus scourged

Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary says scourging meant:

“to whip, flog, scourge ... as a public punishment of the condemned cf. Deut. 25:3; 1 Kings 12:11,14; 2 Cor. 11:24,25; Acts 16:22; 22:24,25. Among Romans, rods were used or whips the thongs of which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal. It was used to wrest confessions from victims ... Its victims tied to a stake with back bared to the tormentors generally fainted from the resulting lacerations or even died. It was forbidden to Roman citizens (Acts 22:25) being generally reserved for slaves or those condemned to death.”

Barnes adds that scourging prior to crucifixion was common in order to increase the horror of the act.

Pilate probably had several purposes in mind for this. It was the beginning preparation for crucifixion (Mark 15:15 Matt. 27:26; Luke 23:25). But he may also have hoped that scourging Jesus might bring a confession from Him so Pilate would feel justified in killing Him. Or perhaps the scourging alone would fill the need and satisfy the Jews so crucifixion itself would not be necessary (see v4; cf. Luke 23:14-16).

Many men died or fainted from the scourging, yet Jesus remained calm enough to later have a further discussion with Pilate afterward.

19:2,3 - Mockery by the soldiers

All the accounts together show that, in addition to the scourging, the soldiers made a great mockery of Jesus' claim to be “King of the Jews.” Commentators remind us how cruel Roman soldiers often were. These were the kind of men who could enjoy watching gladiators attempting to kill one another or wild animals attacking prisoners in the Roman amphitheaters. Such cruelty was common among the kind of men who now began to mock and ridicule the Son of God.

Jesus' own clothes were removed, and He was given various symbols of royalty as a king. He was given a purple or scarlet robe, a color commonly worn by royalty. He was given a crown, but they made one of thorns so it would hurt instead of being an honor. They gave Him a reed to use as a scepter.

Then they mockingly bowed to Him and called Him “King of the Jews.” They spit on Him, and took the reed and hit Him over the head.

This of course would cause the thorns to dig into his scalp at the same time that it belittled his claim to authority.

Probably the Romans all thought of this first as mockery of Jesus Himself. That He would claim to be King of the Jews but have, to their mind, so little proof of it, would seem hilarious to them. Further, this was no doubt a form of mockery of the Jews themselves. The Romans had little respect for the Jews. They considered it difficult and even insulting to police such a stubborn, rebellious, and strange people. So, when given an opportunity to insult one who claimed to be the King of the Jews, they had an opportunity to mock the nation as well.

From Jesus' standpoint, of course, this would all be extremely difficult. These people were powerless before Him and He knew it. He absolutely deserved by inheritance to be king of the Jews (see Matt. 1). But more importantly, as the Son of God He deserved to rule over all these miserable creatures. They had no right to refuse to honor Him, let alone to mock and spit on Him. He could have destroyed them in an instant. He had the power, if He chose, to compel them to immediately apologize for their egotistical insults and then to truly honor Him as king. Yet instead, He knew He had to endure such insults and die, so He said nothing and let them continue in their evil.

19:4,5 - Pilate again brings Jesus before the Jews

John's account adds some details not found in the others. Even after the scourging, Pilate attempted to reason with the Jews or to avoid the responsibility for killing Him. He brought Jesus before the people wearing the robe and crown of thorns. They could see for themselves the suffering He had endured. Pilate affirmed again that he found no reason for Jesus to be killed (cf. 18:38). Surely he hoped this would convince them Jesus had suffered enough, so they would agree to let Him go. But it was not to be.

In declaring Jesus to be innocent, Pilate necessarily implied his own duty to release Him without punishment. As a ruler whose duty it was to administer justice, Pilate had no right to punish an innocent man, let alone crucify Him. When Pilate acknowledged Jesus' innocence, he simultaneously declared himself to be guilty of murder when He then proceeded to kill Him.

19:6 - The Jewish leaders continue to demand Jesus' death

Despite Pilate's efforts to release Jesus, the leaders called out to crucify Him. Perhaps the robe and crown just reminded them of His claim to be king and further infuriated them. In any case, they were surely not willing to release Him.

Pilate responded that they should crucify Him, because Pilate himself had found no fault in Him (18:38; 19:4). He did not really mean to give approval for them to do such, else he would not have proceeded to say that Jesus was innocent. And he surely knew they could

not execute a man; and if they did so, it would not be by crucifixion. Perhaps the implication is that Pilate had found nothing wrong with Jesus, so he did not want to be responsible for His death. If the **Jews** killed Him, that would be their responsibility, but it would be without Pilate's approval.

As already discussed, it is probable that the Jews also did not want the responsibility of actually killing Jesus, because they feared the people. They wanted Him killed, but wanted the Romans to do it so the people would not blame the rulers for it.

19:7 - The Jews affirm that Jesus should die for claiming to be the Son of God

The Jews finally leveled with Pilate enough to make clear that their real problem with Jesus was a religious issue. It was not a matter that He had claimed to be a king or was causing rebellion against Rome.

They said He ought to die according to their law because He made Himself out to be the Son of God (obviously they are not accepting His claim as true). They were saying, in effect, that maybe Jesus had not violated Roman law, but by their law He was guilty of blasphemy. While this did not make Jesus worthy of death in Pilate's view, yet it would explain why they wanted Him dead for reasons of their own law. Perhaps they hoped Pilate would honor their law in this. In any case, their statement constitutes an admission that they had been misleading Pilate about their real concerns up to this point.

19:8,9 - Pilate questions Jesus further about His origin

Pilate was even more distressed by this accusation against Jesus. Romans were very superstitious about gods in the form of men. He decided to question Jesus about where he was from. Presumably, he hoped to see if Jesus would claim Deity or would admit otherwise.

The passage expressly says the Jew's statement made Pilate even more afraid. It is interesting that Jesus was the one being threatened with death, but Pilate is the one who is said to be afraid. In any case, he was caught in the middle. He knew what was right, but did not want to anger the people.

But Jesus did not answer. The question was irrelevant. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and therefore should have released Him. What would Jesus' place or circumstances of origin have to do with it? He was either guilty of a crime or He was not. If He was guilty, proof should be given. If not, He should be released. Guilt or innocence had nothing to do with where He came from. If Pilate was seeking to do justice, he would have released Jesus already. He was proving himself unjust, so why answer questions that are not relevant anyway?

19:10,11 - Pilate claims power to crucify Jesus

Pilate then reminded Jesus of his authority. He had power of life or death over Jesus. He apparently thought this should motivate Jesus to answer his questions.

Jesus answered, but did so by appealing to a higher authority. He said Pilate would have no power against Jesus unless it had been given from above (higher power). Perhaps Pilate thought Jesus was referring to higher Roman authority. It appears from v12 that this reminded him of his responsibility, so he made further attempts to release Jesus. Perhaps he thought Jesus had some influence with Roman authorities.

The power Jesus referred to, however, almost surely was that of Deity: God, even including Jesus Himself. God could have stopped this at any moment, and Jesus had earlier said He Himself had power to stop it (Matt. 26:53). Pilate was being allowed to decide Jesus' fate, but Pilate could have done nothing had God decided to stop it.

Further, all civil authority is from God (Rom. 13:1ff). Any ruler has power to punish evildoers only because God has so ordained it. In any case, the point is that Pilate had a duty to fulfill. He was responsible to higher powers and would be held accountable for his verdict. It appears that Jesus is here granting that civil rulers had the power of capital punishment (but remember that this was still under the Old Testament).

“Greater sin” appears to mean that, though Pilate had responsibility in the matter, the Jews were more responsible, since they had initiated this matter and were trying to force it through. Pilate was responsible in that he had authority to release Jesus, and justice demanded that he do so. However, he at least *wanted* to do right. The Jews sought to kill Jesus because of their envy, and were using every evil and devious trick at their disposal to carry out the evil. Note that both Jews and Romans were responsible for Jesus' death.

19:12 - The Jews accuse Pilate of unfaithfulness to Caesar if he releases Jesus

Apparently Jesus' statement concerned Pilate, for he went back to the Jews and again tried to obtain Jesus' release. He may have been influenced by Jesus' reference to power higher than Pilate's or by Jesus' acknowledgment that Pilate did not bear the greatest responsibility for Jesus' mistreatment. But the Jews proved they were the instigators of the opposition to Jesus by continuing to press for His conviction. They claimed that anyone who made himself a king would be speaking against Caesar; and if Pilate released Jesus, he would not be standing with Caesar.

Pilate knew Jesus was not opposing Caesar, and he probably knew the Jews did not care about Caesar anyway. He perhaps also knew, however, that he could be made to look bad before the Roman author-

ities if this information got back to them. He could be in serious trouble if He failed to kill Jesus and a riot occurred, or if Caesar heard that Pilate had released one who was accused of being a king guilty of treason against Caesar. He chose to sacrifice Jesus, rather than risk suffering himself at the hand of Caesar.

The hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders is incredible. They cared nothing for Caesar. They would have dearly loved for Caesar and all his henchmen to be overthrown. Had Jesus Himself fomented treason against Caesar, they would not have cared, provided He had left them alone and not disturbed their own position and security. But they pretend to care about Caesar's good, as a means of gaining leverage against Pilate.

19:13 - Pilate brings Jesus before the people for a final verdict

Pilate was moved to action by the Jew's accusation that Caesar would be displeased if he released Jesus. Pilate brought Jesus out again, this time into an area called the pavement (Hebrew Gabbatha). There Pilate placed a judgment seat and sat on it. This apparently gave him access to the Jews, who would not come into the building. And it probably indicated that he was about to reach a verdict. The end was near.

19:14,15 - Pilate brings Jesus before them, calling Him their King. But the Jews call for His crucifixion

This was the preparation day of the Passover (cf. v31), about the sixth hour (see notes on Matt. 27 regarding the time element).

Pilate showed Jesus to the people and said, "Behold, your king!" He was perhaps taunting them, or maybe milking the matter for all he could get. If he was going to condemn an innocent man, he wanted some concessions from them in return or at least an opportunity to taunt them for their injustice.

They called out to crucify Jesus. Pilate asked if he should crucify their king. They then claimed to have no king but Caesar. The implication was that they had no allegiance to any ruler but Caesar. This was perhaps the kind of concession Pilate wanted, and perhaps more than even he had hoped for. Instead of himself being accused of unfaithfulness before Caesar, by agreeing to crucify Jesus he had led these recalcitrant Jews to profess allegiance to Caesar.

But the Jews' statement was pure hypocrisy. They hated Caesar. In their hearts and in private they likely denied any allegiance to him whatever. Above all, they surely knew that God was their king (1 Sam. 8). But they played the hypocrite, put on the false front, and pretended to care about Caesar — anything to get the Romans to kill Jesus for them!

19:16-42 - The Crucifixion

19:16,17 - Jesus is delivered for crucifixion

Apparently Pilate had made His final effort to save Jesus. He decided to proceed with the crucifixion. Perhaps he thought that, if this act could get favor toward Caesar from these rebellious Jews, then it might be worth it. In any case, he had gotten something from them in exchange, and he was protecting himself from trouble he might have with higher authorities if they found out he had released someone who claimed to be a king. Nevertheless, his wickedness in murdering a man he knew to be innocent has rightly gained him the reputation throughout history of a self-seeking, unjust coward.

The place of the crucifixion was called Golgotha. This was the Hebrew word. The Latin word was Calvary. It meant “the place of a skull.” It was located outside the city walls (John 19:20; Num. 15:35,36; 1 Kings 21:13; Heb. 13:11,12). It is said by some that there is still a hill near Jerusalem called “skull hill” and some believe this is the place here referred to, though the New Testament does not exactly identify the place nor even specify that it was a hill.

John says that Jesus went out bearing His cross, but other accounts say it was born by Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26; Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21). The usual explanation is that Jesus started out bearing the cross, but was unable to continue because of the pain of the scourging. Other possibilities might be considered, but that is as good an explanation as any.

A Note on Crucifixion:

The pattern followed in Jesus' case was historically typical of Roman crucifixions. The victim was often scourged, then compelled to carry his cross. He was then nailed or lashed to the cross: Jesus was **nailed** (John 20:25ff). This inflicted great pain, especially when the victim moved.

The extremely unnatural position of the body led to cramps. This in turn led to the desire to move, which in turn caused more pain. Blood would drain to the legs. Fever from the wounds, exposure, thirst, and pain was one of the greatest horrors. Nevertheless, victims often survived for 2 to 7 days. In Jesus' case, men were sent to break the legs of the victims to hasten death, but Jesus was already dead. Generally, the cause of death was heart failure.

For all these reasons, crucifixion was one of the most feared means of death. It came to stand for the concept of great troubles and suffering. But in Jesus' case, on top of all else, His Father forsook Him. Further, there was the knowledge that He was innocent and deserved none of this, and that He was the Son of God and could stop it all in a moment.

And He did it all to save us from the punishment of our own sins. This is why the cross in the Bible is the symbol of Jesus' death and the redemption of mankind: 1 Cor. 1:17; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20.

Just as Jesus completely denied His own will to save us, He now requires us to completely give up our own will to please Him: Rom. 12:1,2; Matt. 16:24ff; Gal. 1:20; Rom. 6:6; etc.

19:18 - Jesus was crucified between two other convicts

Jesus was crucified between two other men. Luke says they were "malefactors" or evildoers. Matthew says they were robbers (27:38). This proves the kind of people that this treatment was reserved for. Jesus was treated as a common criminal!

During the crucifixion, Jesus said several things not recorded in John's account. See notes on the other accounts regarding those events. We will concentrate on what John records.

History indicates that crosses could have various shapes, an X or a T or the traditional cross. That fact a title was written above Jesus' head is generally given as confirming the traditional shape. Some claim it was simply an upright post. The Bible does not specify.

19:19-22 - The title with Jesus' accusation

Pilate placed a title, presumably over Jesus' head, stating the accusation made against Him by the Jews that He was "King of the Jews." This was written in the three common languages of the people who would see Him: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. It was placed where all who passed by could see. We are told that the place was near the city, so many saw it.

The reaction of the Jews implies that Pilate put the sign, not to belittle Jesus as much as to belittle the Jews. They were the ones who were bothered by it. Pilate knew they were envious of Jesus. To state publicly that their King was being so ignominiously slain would be a wound to their vanity.

In any case, the Jews were humiliated by it and asked Pilate to remove it. He refused saying, "What I have written, I have written." It said what He wanted it to say and He would not change. He was doing their killing for them. What could they do about the sign?

19:23,24 - The soldiers part Jesus' garments

They crucified Him and divided His garments. This was customary for the soldiers to do with the clothing of the one who was crucified. They divided His clothes among them, but He had a tunic that was woven in one piece. So rather than tear it, they cast lots for it. This fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. The garments were parted (divided), but the vesture was taken by lot. Note the detail in which the prophecy described the event yet hundreds of years before it happened.

19:25-27 - Jesus arranged for His mother's care

As Jesus was dying, His mother stood nearby, along with other women: Mary who was wife of Clopas and also Mary Magdalene. The reference to the sister of Jesus' mother may simply be another description of Mary the wife of Clopas. However, that would make two sisters named Mary in the same family. It could be that, instead, the sister was another unnamed woman. Also present was the apostle John who wrote this account (he is here called the disciple whom Jesus loved). Jesus told Mary that John was her son and He told John that Mary was his mother. As a result, John took her into his home from then on.

Although John and Mary were not physically son and mother, yet Jesus expected John to take her into his home. The Catholic Church claims that this passage proves Mary was to have authority over John as a mother over a son. Then they say John represents all Christians, so Mary has authority over all the church and should be honored as our spiritual mother. Such nonsense! Nothing in the verse says any of this, nor does any other passage. It is a figment of the imagination. The passage explains what Jesus meant: John was to be responsible to provide for Mary.

This shows that Jesus was concerned about how his mother would be cared for after He was dead. When he called John and Mary "mother" and "son," John understood this meant he should take care of her. Jesus had clearly taught that a "son" is to care for his elderly "mother."

There is some question as to why John was expected to care for Mary. There is some evidence that John may have been Mary's nephew. But other passages show that Jesus had brothers and sisters, and they should have had the first responsibility to care for her (see on John 7:1-10). No explanation is given for Jesus' choice; however, the John 7 passage does explain that Jesus' brothers at this time did not believe in Him (though they later came to do so). Perhaps Jesus thought she would be better off with one who shared the true faith. Or perhaps John was simply handy. Or perhaps Jesus knew of other reasons why John was more reasonably equipped to care for Mary (such as financial ability).

Notes on the care of elderly parents

1 Timothy 5:3,4,8,16 — Our parents cared for us when we were young. Now if they are elderly and unable to provide for themselves, we are obligated before God to "repay" them for the care they gave for us. To do this is to show "piety" and please God. To fail to do it is to deny the faith and be worse than an unbeliever. See Matt. 15:3-6; Eph. 6:2,3.

Many modern people put elderly parents in an institution ("nursing home," "old-folks home"). Sometimes these institutions are financed by churches who pool their donations under oversight of a board

of directors, which in turn oversees the care of various widows and elderly people.

Acts 6:1-6 — When widows are the responsibility of a local church to care for, then the local church itself is capable and responsible to set up the necessary supervision to oversee this work, as was done in the church in Jerusalem. Church-sponsored homes for widows and elderly people are part of the whole structure of centralized church organization that characterizes many denominations. Many “churches of Christ” have adopted it, but it is a violation of the New Testament plan for local church work.

1 Timothy 5:16 — Furthermore, the widows and elderly people in these homes, being cared for at church expense, are often relatives of members who ought themselves to provide the care and “let not the church be charged.” The whole scenario is one of shifted responsibility. People refuse to care for their own needy relatives, so they shift the responsibility to the church. The church pays for it, but then shifts the responsibility for overseeing the work to a different, man-made institution.

The example of Jesus, John, and Mary shows the ideal way for caring for elderly parents. Mary was taken into a home: a God-ordained family, not a man-made institution. This solution is both Scriptural and sensible. For many years most people in society accepted and practiced it.

This approach works. It worked well for years in our society, and it still works well if people work it. The elderly people are given better personal care, love, and attention by their children, who are “requiting” their parents for the love and care given to them when they were young.

But it takes time, effort, and sacrifice on the part of the children to care for their relatives. And many children don’t want to be burdened. It is too much trouble to work and sacrifice for their parents, like their parents worked and sacrificed for them when they were young. So, they want to institutionalize them, and even try to get other people to pay for it.

Granted that some elderly people need medical care that simply **cannot** be given by children at home, just like younger people sometimes need to be hospitalized. Sometimes the children honestly cannot take care of their parents due to some difficulty that is honestly beyond their control.

But if children **could** care for their elderly parents, but are just not willing to make that sacrifice, then God says, they are worse than unbelievers. They have denied the faith, transgressed the commandment of God, and are refusing to honor their parents. And they surely are not following the pattern given by Jesus even as He was dying on the cross.

For further discussion of church organization and work, see our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

19:28,29 - Jesus is given sour wine for His thirst

Jesus said, “I thirst,” and was given sour wine or vinegar to drink. Matt. 27:34,48 shows wine mixed with gall was offered him, then later vinegar was offered. [cf. Mark 15:23,36; Luke 23:36]

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Psalms 69:21 — They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. [cf. Psa. 22:15] The sour wine was extended to Jesus by means of hyssop, which was also used in the Passover — Exodus 12:22.

When Jesus was thirsty, He demonstrated a human characteristic. He had a physical body with a physical need to drink, just like you and me. The Bible teaches that Jesus came to earth as a human with all the human characteristics.

Jesus is, was, and always has been God (John 1:1-3; 20:28ff; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8; etc.) As God, He could not lose the characteristics of Deity. But Jesus also took on, when He came to earth, the form of a man with fully human characteristics. He was fully man and yet fully God.

Philippians 2:5-8 — Jesus existed in the form of God, but gave up that honor and glory (“reputation” — KJV), humbled himself, and came to earth in likeness and fashion as a man.

John 1:1,14 — In the beginning, the Word was with God (the Father) and was God. But He became **flesh** and dwelt among men.

Hebrews 2:9-11,14f,17f — Jesus was made lower than the angels (like all men are — vv 6,7), so He could suffer death, overcome death in resurrection, and thereby defeat Satan who has the power of death. He partook of flesh and blood and was made like us in all things. This is why the gospels often call Him the “Son of Man.”

Jesus’ thirst on the cross is just part of all the agony He endured. The thirst was not a normal thirst as we may have after an hour or two without drinking. This was the thirst of a man at the hands of His tormentors.

If we have ever been **really** thirsty, then we have just a small idea of one little part of all the suffering Jesus endured for us. He could have stopped it at any moment because He was God. But because He loved us, He endured the suffering without exercising His Divine powers, suffered the death, so we could be saved.

19:30 - Jesus' death

When Jesus had suffered on the cross, He said, “It is finished,” then He died. What was finished? When Jesus died, many things had been accomplished. Probably the direct reference was to the suffering

and agony He had endured, but in a deeper sense and at least in a symbolic sense, Jesus' death was the completion of many other things too.

His earthly ministry was finished (John 17:4-8). He had come, not just to die, but to reveal and teach the gospel of the New Testament. He had labored for over three years in this work. Now it was completed.

He finished or removed the Old Testament and replaced it with His gospel: Heb. 8:8,9; Heb. 10:9,10; Col. 2:14,16 [Eph. 2:13-16; Gal. 3:13; Rom 7:2-6]. His purpose here included removing the Old Testament, because it could not provide justification, and replacing it with His New Testament that could save us from sin. This too was accomplished when He nailed the law to His cross.

Above all, Jesus' sacrifice for the sins of all mankind was finished. Though He was sinless, He died in our place as if He were a sinner, so we who are guilty could avoid the punishment of our sins. Matthew 20:28; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:6-10; Heb. 9:22,26; 9:15; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6.

The sacrifice of Jesus was the greatest sacrifice ever known. It offers the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. But it also required Jesus to pay a great price. Jesus had died for you and me.

19:31-33 - The legs of the thieves are broken, but not Jesus' legs

The Jews wanted Pilate to break the legs of those who had been crucified to hasten their deaths. This was the day of preparation for the high or holy day. Bodies could not remain on the cross that day. The law commanded not to leave a dead body hanging (Deut. 21:22,23). But if the men died on the high day, they would have to be taken down, and those who touched their bodies would be unclean and could participate in the Passover activities. So, they wanted the deaths hastened, so they could take care of the bodies before sundown.

Note the repeated hypocrisy. The Jews did not mind murdering an innocent man, but they dared not touch the murdered man's body and become so unclean that they could not observe a holy day!

The soldiers came and broke the legs of the thieves who had been crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus, they did not break His legs because He had already died.

Here is the clear testimony of the soldiers that Jesus was dead. This, along with other evidence, proves that he had not just swooned or fainted (as some claim) and later revived in the tomb. These men were expert at their jobs. They would know the difference between fainting and death. The fact they did not break Jesus' legs is their testimony that Jesus was really dead.

19:34,35 - Jesus' side pierced by a spear

Instead of breaking Jesus' legs, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear. Blood and water flowed out. This also constitutes

medical evidence that Jesus was really dead. The spear must have reached the membrane surrounding the heart and released the fluid that collected there after death. This fluid flowed out along with blood.

Further, this action caused a wound in Jesus' side so large a man's hand could fit into it (John 20:27). If Jesus had not already died, this would surely have finished the job.

John makes it clear that he personally witnessed this. He wrote to give his testimony. All the skeptics of all time may quibble, but they were not there. One who *was* there records this evidence, which he personally witnessed, so we may know that Jesus really was *dead*. It appears that John is especially making clear that he was an eyewitness, so none could deny that Jesus really died.

19:36,37 - That Jesus' bones were not broken fulfills another prophecy

That Jesus' bones were not broken, but He was pierced, also fulfills Old Testament Scripture.

That none of His bones would be broken fulfills Num. 9:12; Ex. 12:46; Psalm 34:20.

That He would be pierced fulfills Zech. 12:10.

John makes this clear so we understand, not just that Jesus really did die, but that many details of His death expressly fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. How could all this be if Jesus were not from God? Would God allow an impostor to so fulfill Scripture?

19:38 - Joseph of Arimathea secretly took possession of Jesus' body

After Jesus had clearly died, a man named Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate granted him to take it.

Several things are told in the various accounts about Joseph. He was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews (John 19:38). One wonders at the legitimacy of being a secret disciple at a time when people needed to speak out for Jesus. On the other hand, he apparently had much more courage than many or most other disciples for he boldly asked for Jesus' body.

He was a rich man (Matt. 27:57). This also helps explain why he asked for Jesus' body. He had the means to provide a good tomb for it. This fulfills Isaiah 53:9 which said the Messiah would have his grave with the wicked and be with a rich man in his death. Though He had died a criminal's death, yet He was buried in an honorable tomb.

Joseph was also a councilor of honorable estate (Mark 15:43), but had not consented to Jesus' death (Luke 23:51). So, he was not only wealthy but also powerful and influential. This could mean that he had been on the Sanhedrin council and had there opposed Jesus' death. Or perhaps he was not on that council but just had a high position and had no real say in the decision, yet he did not agree with it.

He was a good and righteous man who looked for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50,51). He apparently believed the kingdom was coming soon; and since He was a disciple of Jesus, it is apparent that he had expected Jesus to be the king.

Mark adds that, when Joseph asked for Jesus' body, Pilate was surprised that He was already dead. He sent for the centurion to determine from him whether Jesus really was dead. Here is further evidence Jesus really died on that cross. As professional executioners, it is highly unlikely that those in charge would make a mistake about such a fundamental point. So, Pilate's appeal to the centurion constitutes further proof that Jesus really did die.

19:39,40 - Nicodemus joins Joseph in preparing Jesus' body for burial

John tells briefly how the body of Jesus was prepared for burial. Nicodemus (cf. John 3:iff) helped Joseph, and they used the spices that were customary in Jewish burials in that day: myrrh and aloes. About a hundred pounds of spices were placed with Jesus' body and it was then wrapped in strips of linen cloth. Also, when they buried him, Mary Magdalene and another Mary sat where they could see (Matt. 27:61).

Joseph was a good, honest man, the story says. And three other honest people were involved to some extent. If they had discovered that Jesus was not really dead, they would never have remained silent while the apostles preached that He had been raised from the dead. In addition to the soldier's testimony and John's testimony, we have the implied testimony of these people that Jesus really was dead.

19:41,42 - The body of Jesus is buried

Next John gives a description of the tomb where Jesus was buried. It was a new tomb, hewn from rock (Matt. 27:60). After the body was placed inside, a large stone was rolled against the door (an exceeding great one — Mark 16:4). This tells us that it was a cave, which was a common form of burial in that day (remember that Abraham buried Sarah in a cave). This was the kind of tomb in which Lazarus was buried (11:38).

John adds that the tomb was in a garden near the place of crucifixion, and that no man had yet been laid in it. It was not uncommon to use the same cave to bury several people, but no one else was in this tomb.

This is all useful information. First, if it was a new tomb in which there was no other body, then there could be no mistake about which body left the tomb. There could have been no switching of bodies or any such sleight of hand. The body of Jesus was definitely placed in the tomb, as at least four people can testify from this record. And there was no other body there.

Furthermore, the walls were solid rock and a huge rock rolled over the door. Therefore, there was no way to sneak the body out or dig it out a back way. Nor could Jesus have awakened from a swoon after all the suffering He had endured and simply walked out or dug His way out. He would have been in no condition to move the stone and no other exit was possible.

Note that Jesus' burial was symbolic of our baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). As He was completely surrounded in the element, so we must be in baptism: a complete immersion.

Matt. 27:62-66 adds that the Jews provided a security guard around the tomb for the express purpose of making sure the disciples did not remove the body.

Jesus' burial is part of the fundamental truths of the gospel – 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. His death was necessary for the burial, and the burial helps confirm the resurrection. The scene was set for the most fundamental miracle of the gospel.

John 20

Chap. 20 & 21 - The Resurrection (cf. Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24)

20:1-18 - The Women Visit the Tomb (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12)

Note on the accounts of the resurrection:

The accounts of the resurrection constitute testimony from various witnesses about what they saw and personally witnessed. As with other testimony, each witness tells what he/she saw, and each may omit things described by others.

This does not mean there is a contradiction, but only that God is accomplishing the very purpose for which witnesses are called to testify to any historical event. The intent is to give the viewpoints of several different individuals. The result is a complete account of all we need to know about what happened. Sufficient detail is given to make sure the testimony is conclusive. With the accounts of several witnesses, we have the kind of evidence accepted by both God and man in historical testimony (cf. John 8:17).

The writers never claim that every detail is stated in its exact chronological sequence. As a matter of standard procedure, historians rarely record all events exactly chronologically. Rather, the writer will follow a particular person or series of events in one place or circumstance, then he will move to follow another person or series of events elsewhere. This generally requires an overlap of time with flashbacks, etc.

Furthermore, this was a time of great excitement, confusion, and even disorder. Many events happened simultaneously, or people may have even acted in disarray and disorder. But when events happen simultaneously or overlap, only one can be recorded at a time. And when people act in disorderly ways, no account of their actions could possibly seem orderly.

Note specifically that the writer John was either a personal eyewitness to every event recorded in these chapters, or else he received an account directly and personally from those who were eyewitnesses. This is not legend or myth recorded many generations later, nor was it passed through many people till it was written. The man who writes is one who personally was present or else had personal firsthand testimony given to him by those who were present.

20:1 - Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb

On the first day of the week, some ladies came to the tomb. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see notes on Matt. 27:61). The other Mary was the mother of James and Joses (Mark 16:1). Also present were Salome (Mark 16:1) and Joanna and other women (Luke 24:10). They may have come in different groups arriving at slightly different times, having agreed to meet at the tomb. This may explain different details in the accounts.

Their purpose was to see the tomb. Other accounts add that they wanted to anoint the body with spices they had brought (Mark 16:1). The body had been hastily prepared and buried (John 19:38-41). Perhaps they wanted to make sure the job was well completed. Also John 19:42 might imply that some disciples considered this tomb to be only a temporary resting place till after the Sabbath. The women might have come early so they would arrive before Joseph came to move the body to another tomb elsewhere.

Mary was the first to arrive at the tomb, but by the time she arrived the stone had already been removed.

See notes on Matt. 28 regarding how time was measured and the time when various events occurred. What is stated is that, however time was accounted, Jesus was raised on the first day of the week and on that day He first began to appear to disciples. This definitely was the third day since He had been crucified (Luke 24:1,13-21).

Comparing the various accounts it seems that the women came on the morning of the first day of the week, as the sun was just appearing, but while it was still shadowy and “dark” in the garden and hilly areas, making it hard to see distinctly. Perhaps Mary Magdalene hastened ahead of the other women and arrived before the sun was up (while “it was still dark”), whereas the main body of the group arrived later after the sun had appeared. (Note “we” in v2, indicating others had been there too.) Or, perhaps the language means that Mary “went to the tomb” while it was still dark, referring to the time when she left her house. But by the time she arrived, the sun may have risen.

Significance of the First Day of the Week

Mark 16:9 — Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus is in many ways the greatest event in the history of the world. We are nowhere directly told what day of the week Jesus died, but all four gospel accounts tell us Jesus arose on the first day of the week, and all of them mention it repeatedly. Why this emphasis on the first day unless there is some significance to it? (Luke 24:1,4,21; Mk. 16:2; Matt. 26:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-10; see also the verses under the following points.)

John 20:19 — Jesus first appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week. The appearances of Jesus are also crucial to our faith be-

cause by them He proved to the world He really is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:1-8). On that same first day of the week on which He arose, He appeared several times to different groups of people (Mark 16:2,9; Matt. 26:1,8-10; Luke 24:1,19-21; John 20:1,11-19).

John 20:26 — The second day on which Jesus appeared to disciples was the next first day of the week. Again we are told the disciples came together. This was the eighth day after the first appearances. The way days were counted would make this the next first day of the week (cf. Lev. 23:39).

Acts 2:1 — The day of Pentecost was a first day of the week (Lev. 23:15,16). The disciples were gathered on this day, and the Holy Spirit came to their meeting. As a result, many assembled together, the gospel was preached, and 3000 were baptized. On this first day of the week: (1) The Holy Spirit came. (2) The gospel was preached for the first time. (3) The first people were converted and became Christians. (4) The church began (cf. v47).

Acts 20:7 — The disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. This may be the only time the Lord's Supper is directly mentioned on the first day of the week, but it is certainly not the only passage that shows the first day of the week is significant.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — The churches took up collections each first day of the week. This does not directly mention the Christians assembling, but that is surely the reasonable conclusion.

Many of the greatest events in the history of the church occurred on the first day of the week. And of the occasions referring to the first day of the week, four of them describe Christians assembling on the first day of the week, and a fifth surely implies assembling. How can anyone doubt God's emphasis of special significance for the first day of the week?

By contrast, note the complete absence of any real significance attached to the seventh day of the week regarding these events or any other important events during this time. Jesus came again to life and appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week, giving great joy and hope. But on the seventh day He was still in the tomb, still dead, while His disciples wept and grieved. The seventh day lacked any significance but was a time only of depression and sorrow.

20:2 - Mary runs to report to Peter and John

Mary apparently did not enter the tomb as did the women who came later (in Matthew's account); or if she entered, the angel did not appear to her. Most likely, seeing the stone removed, the women agreed that the main group of them would remain at the tomb, while Mary ran to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved (obviously referring to John — see on John 21:20-24). While she was gone, the angel appeared to the other women.

Having found Peter and John, Mary reported that the Lord had been removed from the tomb and she did not know where they had laid Him. Apparently, she thought the Jews had removed the body or perhaps Joseph or some other disciples had removed it for some purpose.

Note that the term “we” implies Mary was not alone at the tomb, which agrees with the other accounts. Further, Mary definitely left the tomb before the others did because the others saw the angels and were told that He had risen and they should tell the disciples the news. Mary did not say He had been raised but seemed confused where He might be.

20:3-5 - Peter and John run to the tomb

Peter and John then ran to the tomb to see for themselves. John ran faster, arrived first at the tomb, looked inside, but hesitated to go in. He saw the linen clothes there. Remember that John is the writer so this information is first-hand personal testimony.

20:6,7 - Peter and John enter the tomb

When Peter arrived, however, true to form, he went right into the tomb to examine it. The linen cloths were lying in one place and the napkin that had surrounded the head was folded and laid separately from the other grave clothes.

This would indicate Jesus had left alive, under His own power. If any man, friend or foe, had stolen the body (as the Jews claimed), they would surely not have removed the grave clothes, let alone taken the time to fold the head cloth. Remember, the Jews had stationed soldiers at the tomb to prevent the removal of the body. Anyone who took the body would be in great haste. To remove the grave clothes would take too much time and would have left them with a naked corpse of a decaying body. Folding the head cloth would be absurd in such a case. No thief would take such time. Instead, they would have grabbed the body, grave clothes and all, and escaped as quickly as possible.

Further, these details demonstrate the power of observation of the witnesses. They are good witnesses and were not so hectic they could not observe details.

20:8-10 - John also entered the tomb, but He and Peter were confused about what had happened

After Peter entered the tomb, then John entered and saw for himself what Peter had seen. Again, this is first-hand testimony from the author. He then believed. This must mean he believed Jesus was gone, but v9 shows they did not understand that He had risen from the dead.

The disciples then left to go to their homes, confused and unsure about the turn of events.

Note that, presumably the other women had gone into the tomb and seen the angels there during the time that Mary had run to find

Peter and John (no telling how far she had to go to find them). By the time they arrived at the tomb, the angels had appeared to the other women and had told them to go tell the disciples that Jesus had been raised. Then the angels left. While the women were gone, Peter and John arrived and entered the tomb as described here. Then Mary herself returned and Jesus subsequently appeared to her as the account proceeds to record. There may be other explanations for the various records, but this seems as reasonable as any.

20:11-13 – Angels speak to Mary Magdalene

Mary was also at the tomb. She had apparently followed Peter and John back, probably more slowly since she had run to find them. She was also weeping; so clearly she did not yet understand that He had been raised, else she would have been rejoicing.

But she looked into the tomb and saw something that apparently Peter and John had not seen. There were two angels, dressed in white, sitting where Jesus had lain, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They asked her why she was weeping and she explained that she did not know where they had taken her Lord.

We are not told why the angels had not appeared to Peter and John. Perhaps Jesus wanted to personally appear to them. They were to be eyewitnesses, chosen to bear the testimony, so perhaps it was best if they first saw Him personally.

20:14,15 - Jesus appears to Mary

Then Mary turned around and saw Jesus Himself standing there, though she did not recognize Him. We are not told why she did not recognize Him. It may have still been somewhat shadowy in the early morning in the garden, she had tears in her eyes that would blur her vision, and she was certainly not expecting to see Jesus - she thought He was dead! V16 also indicates that she did not yet turn to look directly at Him.

So Jesus asked why she was crying and for whom she was seeking. The questions got her attention, but perhaps they also were intended to lead to the fact that she had no reason to weep (cf. Luke 24:5).

Mary thought He might be the gardener, so she asked Him if He had removed the body. If so, she would go and find it and take it away. Obviously she still thought she was looking for a dead body, not the living Son of God.

20:16-18 - Mary recognizes Jesus

Jesus then simply called her name. No gardener would have done so. Perhaps the tone was familiar. In any case, she turned directly to Him, recognized Him, and called Him “Rabboni” (teacher).

He told her not to cling to Him. “Cling” (Gk. *απτω*) is translated “touch” (ASV). But Vine says it means: “primarily, to fasten to ... (b) to cling to, lay hold of, John 20:17...”

Vine thinks Jesus said this because He did not want Mary to think she needed continued physical contact with Him but would have fellowship with Him by faith. Thayer thinks the point is that she did not need to physically touch Him to know He had been raised. This latter explanation is nonsense, however, because later He urged people to touch Him so they could know He had been raised (v26ff).

“Clinging” carries the idea of a prolonged holding, as to detain someone. Perhaps the point is that He did not want her to stay there at length rejoicing in the fact He had appeared to her. Instead, she had other things to do (go tell the disciples), and perhaps He had other things to do too.

Jesus gave an express reason why she should not cling to Him: He had not yet ascended to the Father. Perhaps the idea was that she should not try to hold on to Him as to keep Him here on earth (see Matt. 28:9). The disciples had been so determined that He would set up an earthly kingdom that, now He had been raised, they might not realize that He still had to leave them again to ascend to His Father. They might try to keep Him on earth as king. They needed to realize they could not so cling to Him, but had to let Him go back to the Father. Or perhaps He is just reassuring her that He would remain among them a while before He ascended to the Father, so she did not need to worry that He might immediately disappear again.

Jesus had told Mary to go tell the disciples that He had appeared to her, so she did as He had told her to.

Harmony of the accounts

Mark 16:9 agrees that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Obviously, this account in John records that first appearance. But Matthew 28:9,10 seems to indicate that Jesus appeared to the women as they went to tell the disciples the message given them by the angels (though perhaps He appeared to them after they had told the disciples of the angels). Yet clearly the appearance to Mary occurred after she had told Peter and John. This may seem to be a contradiction, but there is no real problem if a period of time elapsed between Matt. 28:8 and 9.

Perhaps when Mary first saw the tomb (arriving a little ahead of the others), she left the group and ran to find Peter and John. The other women went to investigate the tomb, saw the angels, and received the message. Mary meantime had found Peter and John and brought them to the tomb. They arrived after the other women had seen the angels and left (by another route). When Peter and John had looked around and left, then Jesus appeared to Mary. After Mary left, Jesus transported Himself (as He could apparently do quite quickly) to appear to the other women who were still on the road elsewhere. The women, followed closely by Mary, found the disciples and reported what they had seen.

This brings up another question. Luke 24:12 says Peter went to the tomb *after* all the women had reported having seen the angels. Perhaps this means that Peter *returned* to the tomb a second time. He went the first time when Mary said the stone was removed, as recorded by John. But when the women said they had seen angels who said He had been raised, then he went back a second time. This would not be unlike Peter and would, in fact, be a perfectly reasonable thing to do under the circumstances. The first time at the tomb, he did not know about the claim of angels and the resurrection. It would be reasonable to check again after he had heard further information. Perhaps he even hoped that the angels would still be there so he could see them too. Perhaps this is even when Jesus did appear to Him (Luke 24:35 and 1 Cor. 15:5, though v24 makes this doubtful).

Still another possibility is that the women remained in the general vicinity of the tomb (maybe even searching the area for information about where the body was) till after Peter and John had left. Then Mary saw the angels and, still separated from the group, saw Jesus. Meanwhile, the other women returned to the tomb and saw the angels, who told them to give the message of the resurrection to the apostles. Then as they went, Jesus appeared to them all.

20:19-25 - The First Appearance to the Disciples

20:19,20 - Jesus appears to the apostles

Later, on the same day (the first day of the week), the disciples were assembled and the doors were shut because they feared the Jews. Their Master had been killed and they did not know when they might be pursued next. They had anticipated that He would lead them in rebellion against the Romans and would set up an earthly kingdom. Peter had even used His sword against those who arrested Him. On the night before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had warned them of coming persecution. Now they had no idea what the authorities might do to them.

Nevertheless, despite the closed doors, Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst. The implication is that this was a miracle that He entered the room that was closed (and by implication locked) to prevent their being taken by surprise by the authorities. He greeted them with a message of peace. Perhaps this was to keep them from being overly upset, when they were so afraid of attack, that One whom they considered dead would so suddenly appear in their midst.

Jesus then showed them His hands and feet, and they were glad. This shows the factual nature of these appearances. They were not hallucinations or dreams. The witnesses were able to personally observe the body and the marks that proved it to really be Jesus. This also demonstrates that it was a physical resurrection, not just some spiritual phenomenon. It completely refutes the false claims of all who deny

the resurrection or who claim Jesus never came in the flesh or never arose in the flesh.

God has always been a God of evidence. Throughout John's record he has given proof on which to base our faith. We are not expected to accept the claims of Jesus as being valid on the basis of speculation, opinion, or "blind faith." Remember also that John was a first-hand witness at all these events.

Note that John again emphasizes that this day was the first day of the week, and that it was the same day that the other events occurred. Hence, without doubt, Jesus arose on the first day of the week and began appearing alive from the dead on that day. If the first day is not significant but we are really supposed to be observing today the seventh-day Sabbath as some teach, why did nothing significant happen on the seventh day but we are repeatedly and specifically told that major events happened on the first day of the week? (See notes above on vi.)

20:21-23 - Jesus sends them on a mission for which the Holy Spirit would guide them

The Father had sent Jesus into the world with a mission. He was likewise sending them on a mission (see 17:18). This was no doubt part of, or related to, the giving of the Great commission. See notes on Matt. 28:18ff and cf. Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47-49.

To fulfill the work Jesus wanted them to do, the apostles would need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus breathed on them and said for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Some think they received the Holy Spirit right then, but why would this be the necessary meaning of the language? "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" simply means that He intended for them to receive it. When they would receive it is not stated. Why not rather take all that is stated in other passages about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them?

In His appearance to them in Acts 1:3-8, He told them to tarry in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit before they began their preaching work. Acts 1:5 said they would receive the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem "not many days from now." Luke's account of the great commission expressly told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem till the power came from on high. Jesus also told them (in the other gospel accounts) to go into all the world and preach the gospel. But they did not go right then. They went after the Holy Spirit came on them on Pentecost in Acts 2.

In John 21 He told Peter to "Feed my lambs." But no one takes that statement to mean that Peter did this immediately. It was an instruction to prepare Peter for what his later role would be. Furthermore, He here said that they would retain or forgive of sins (v23), but that was not done immediately.

Jesus is here simply preparing them for the work He intended them to do, and He gives some information they would need to do the work. The actual accomplishment of these things came after He was gone. He here speaks of the purpose of His New Testament, which began to be preached when the Holy Spirit did come on them in Acts 2.

Why then did He breathe on them? It was probably a visual aid to demonstrate the fact that they would eventually receive the Holy Spirit. It was symbolic to show the Spirit would come from Him to come upon them. But nothing here or anywhere before Acts 2 indicates they received the Holy Spirit or that the Spirit did anything through them before Acts 2. See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:3-8.

Forgiving or retaining sins

Jesus told them, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” How was this done? Note that the passage does not here define how it was done. But they were told that it would be done by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that they would receive.

Not a special priesthood with power to directly forgive sin

Nothing here says that priests in the Catholic Church have the power to directly forgive sins, as the Catholic Church claims. Such would contradict other teachings elsewhere.

Mark 2:7-12 says only God can forgive sins. No man has the power to do so.

“The words ‘priest,’ ‘priesthood’ ... are never applied in the New Testament to the office of the Christian ministry. All Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Apoc. 5:10)” — *Catholic Dictionary*, p. 692. This is the admission of an official Catholic reference work and, in this, they teach the truth taught in the Scriptures they cite. The consequence of this admission is that, in the New Testament, there was no special priesthood to confess sins to!

Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12 – All Christians can pray to God through Christ for forgiveness of their own sins.

James 5:16 – This passage is sometimes cited as authority for confession to a priest. But it says any righteous man (not some special priestly class) can pray for the sins of another Christian. And praying is as far as we can go. Neither this nor any other passage says humans can actually forgive sins committed against God.

1 Timothy 2:5,6 – Jesus is the only mediator between God and us. He mediates because He died as our ransom. If priests could forgive sins, then they too would mediate between God and us in forgiveness. But they cannot do so, because they are not the one Mediator, and because they did not die for us.

Sins forgiven or retained by man's response to the gospel message

Other passages explain how the apostles forgave or retained sins. They were empowered by the Spirit to preach the terms of forgiveness when they preached the gospel - Mark 16:15,16. The promise in Acts 1:8 says that the Spirit would guide them, so they would be Jesus' witnesses. This was the mission on which Jesus was about to send them (v21), as abundantly testified by the other accounts of the Great Commission and by Acts 1 (see on v21 above).

This is exactly the work the apostles did as revealed in the book of Acts, beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:4,14-41,47). The Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. They proclaimed the terms under which people's sins could be forgiven. When people obeyed the gospel, the sins were forgiven. When they refused to obey, they were "condemned" — their sins were retained. The response of the people determined whether or not they actually received the forgiveness God offered. And there is surely no indication the apostles could pass on to future generations any power to forgive sins.

20:24-31 - The Second Appearance of Jesus to the 12

20:24,25 - Thomas insists that he must personally witness Jesus' hands and side

For some unexplained reason, the apostle Thomas had not been present on that first day when Jesus had been raised and had appeared to the other disciples. They told him about what had happened, but he refused to believe. He said he had to see for himself and personally examine the print of the nails and spear before he would believe.

We may criticize Thomas for being a "doubter," yet it is to our advantage that he did so. Because of him, we have been given another account of overwhelming evidence that Jesus really arose. He also demonstrates that the disciples were not gullible people easily fooled by an impostor. They were skeptical, and were convinced only after adequate evidence was given.

The case of Thomas also demonstrates the value of being present when God's people meet. For whatever reason he had not been present, he demonstrates that there are many blessings missed when we do not come to be with God's people when they meet.

20:26,27 - Jesus offers Thomas direct evidence

Eight days later the disciples were again assembled. Note that this would again be on a first day of the week, according to the common way of counting days (cf. Lev. 23:39). The doors were again shut, but this time Thomas was present.

Note that this event again occurred on a first day of the week, we are expressly again told the time, and the disciples were again as-

sembled on this day. They were already meeting on this special day of the week. And whatever their reason for meeting on this day, Jesus clearly chose to honor their meeting on that day with His presence. We are expressly told the day on which they met, and we are expressly told that Jesus chose to meet with them on that day. The evidence mounts that the first day of the week, not the seventh day, is the special day of significance to Christians.

Jesus appeared as before, and directly gave Thomas the opportunity to see the holes in his hands and the hole in his side. Note that this shows clearly that Jesus' crucifixion did involve nails being driven into His hands. It also, as stated on v20, proves beyond doubt that Jesus really was raised and that His resurrection was literal and physical. See also 1 John 1:1; Luke 24:39,40.

Note also, once again, that Jesus did not hesitate to give honest people the evidence they need to be convinced of the historical fact of those great miracles that are fundamental to our faith. The miracles are forcefully stated as historical fact, and these historical facts are deliberately and openly presented as evidence on which to base our faith. Having given Thomas the evidence, Jesus directly urges him to believe – that states the purpose for giving the evidence (cf. vv 28-31). We should not be ashamed of basing our faith on Bible accounts of miracles, especially the resurrection. They were written for that very purpose.

It is interesting that Jesus obviously knew that Thomas had earlier stated his doubts, though Jesus had not been there when Thomas made the statement. This too should have given Thomas some evidence.

And finally note that Jesus challenged Thomas to be a believer, not a disbeliever. Those who do not believe in the resurrection are “unbelieving” (“faithless” - KJV). They may claim to be Christians, disciples, or followers of Jesus. They may preach from the pulpits of “Christian” denominations or teach in “Christian” seminaries. But Jesus Himself states that, so long as they do not acknowledge the truth of the resurrection, they are “faithless.” They are not just honest skeptics. They are “unbelievers.” They are not Christians, regardless of their claims. Cf. Romans 10:9,10.

20:28 - Thomas confesses Jesus to be “Lord and God”

The evidence was so convincing that Thomas was convinced. He called Jesus “my Lord and my God.” He recognized Jesus as his Ruler (master) and as Deity. He did not confess Jesus to be just a good man, a great teacher, a prophet, and lawgiver. He was God in the flesh (see notes on John 1:1ff). This is the conclusion to which John seeks to bring all of His readers.

This passage unquestionably confirms Jesus' Deity. If Jesus was not God, it would have been absolutely blasphemous for Him to allow

Thomas to use such terminology and not rebuke Him for it. But instead of rebuking Thomas, Jesus said everybody else should believe the same thing (v29)!

In other passages people have mistakenly honored mere humans by giving them names or other expressions of honor that apply only to Deity. This is always forbidden (Acts 10:25,26; 12:20-23; 14:11-16; Rev. 22:8,9). For Jesus to have accepted these terms from Thomas without objecting would have been sinful **unless** He is Deity.

In an attempt to evade the force of John 1:1, some people argue that the reference there to Jesus as “God” does not have the definite article. Such an argument is not valid, since θεος without the article often is used for God (see notes on John 1:1). Yet here in this passage the expression most definitely has the article (ὁ θεος) and is clearly used for Jesus. It follows that those, who make this argument on John 1:1, must acknowledge that θεος with the article must refer to true Deity, and here that very phrase is used for Jesus. If they still do not accept the fact that the gospel teaches Jesus possesses true Deity, they are without excuse.

In making this statement, Thomas demonstrates the absolute necessity, not just of believing who Jesus is, but also of confessing Jesus. Confession of Jesus has ever been a defining condition of discipleship. Those who believe must confess (see on John 11:27). When people will not confess, they cannot be saved even if they do believe (John 12:42,43). Cf. Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

20:29 - Jesus pronounces a blessing on all who believe

Thomas had believed because he was able to personally observe the evidence. He personally and physically saw and touched Jesus. However, Jesus knew that many people later (including all of us today) would not have that same opportunity, yet they still should believe in Him. Faith is conviction that does not have personal first-hand experience as its basis (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:8).

Many today demand similar evidence to what Thomas had. They insist they must have some miracle or some personal experience in order for them to believe. Jesus is clearly saying that such will not occur. People who demand miracles today or other physical evidence are here informed they will not receive such.

This does not mean, however, that there is no evidence at all. Thomas had no advantage in personally seeing Jesus. The difference is in the **kind** of evidence. John immediately proceeded to state that we **do** have evidence for our faith. It is the evidence of eyewitness testimony in the word. Religion differs from experimental science, not in

that the latter is true and the former is not, but only in the nature of the evidence.

But once again note carefully that God does give us the evidence we need. It is today in the form of eyewitness testimony. But Jesus expressly says that we must believe about Him just as Thomas did. The blessing that Jesus pronounces here, and all the spiritual blessings of the gospel, are only for those who truly believe.

20:30,31 - The signs that convince us to believe are now written in Scripture

Here John plainly states what is unquestionably the theme of his book. He did not intend to record all of Jesus' miracles (see 21:25). But he did record enough to produce faith in the heart of any honest person. The resurrection of Jesus is just one of the proofs John gave, but it is surely one of the most important and convincing.

The theme of John's book is to provide evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This faith is essential in order for us to have eternal life, and the written evidence given by Divine inspiration is sufficient to produce that faith. John emphasizes again that we must have this faith to receive eternal life. God gives the evidence, but we must accept it as true to be saved.

What more could we want than what we have in the Scriptures? Some insist that they need to personally witness a miracle in order to believe. John and Jesus here expressly deny such a need. Jesus said we can and must believe without seeing direct proof, like Thomas saw (v29). In the time when inspired men were doing miracles, people had the right to expect miracles as evidence. But that was before the message had been written, with its eyewitness testimony of confirming miracles. Now that we have the written word, it is sufficient to give us the evidence we need to believe (Romans 10:17).

Furthermore, we do not need modern prophets to repeat the message. We have in the inspired Scriptures all that we need to know to serve God and receive eternal life (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3). Contrary to those who seek modern-day spiritual gifts, the written message is adequate to produce faith to lead to eternal life. To claim that something more is needed is to contradict John's expressed purpose. The **written word** is adequate.

And once again we have a divinely inspired statement that miracles were done and written to produce faith. God knows we need evidence and He has openly and abundantly provided it. No religious faith besides the gospel of Jesus has such convincing evidence that it is a valid revelation from God. Whether or not any specific individual actually receives eternal life will be determined by whether or not he is honest enough to investigate and accept the evidence provided.

A Summary of the People to Whom Jesus Appeared

Why did Jesus appear to people after His resurrection? It was obviously to prove that He really had been raised. He had said He would do it. Having done it, He used this means to produce many eyewitnesses to testify that He had done it.

God is a God of evidence. He gives us proof on which to base our faith. He wanted witnesses to testify of the resurrection, so Jesus appeared to many to qualify them to bear testimony to us and to the world that Jesus really is the Son of God as attested by the resurrection. See 1 Cor. 15:1-8; Acts 1:3, 20-26; 2:22-36; 10:36-43; 17:30,31; John 20:26-31; etc.

Here is a brief summary of the people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection:

- 1) Mary Magdalene — Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18
- 2) The women — Matt. 28:8-10
- 3) Two disciples on the road to Emmaus — Luke 24:13-35
- 4) The 11 apostles — Matt. 27:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:5,7; John 20:19-21:25; Acts 1:3-11
- 5) Joseph and Matthias — Acts 1:20-26
- 6) Peter — 1 Cor. 15:5
- 7) 500 brethren at once — 1 Cor. 15:6
- 8) James — 1 Cor. 15:7
- 9) Paul — 1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:1ff; 22:1ff; 26:1ff

John 21

21:1-25 - Another Appearance to the Apostles (in Galilee)

This section may serve as an epilogue to John's record.

In some ways, 20:30,31 make a fitting conclusion to John's record. So, some people think chap. 21 was written after the other material, some claim it is an afterthought that John added later, and others even question its genuineness. However, the language is such that it surely was written by John, just as the rest of the book was. And there can be no doubt that it is inspired and belongs with the rest of the book, since all copies of the book, no matter how old they are, include this section. All the evidence indicates that it was with the book from the time it first began to be circulated.

I see no reason to think it is an afterthought or was added after the other material had been written. Lots of writers include material in the nature of an epilogue with their writings, having planned all along to do so. John 1:1-18 serves as a sort of prologue to the book, but no one uses that as a reason to call its veracity into question or to claim it is an afterthought that John did not originally intend to include. So why should we question his intent in writing an epilogue. In any case, the important point is that John wrote it by inspiration, just as he wrote the rest of the book.

21:1,2 - Several apostles were together in Galilee

This passage records still another appearance of Jesus to the apostles. As with the other appearances, John would have been a personal eyewitness to this one. He assures us that this is a true account (v24).

King points out that such repeated appearances to the apostles would be important because they would soon be given the responsibility to preach the gospel throughout the world in the face of great opposition. They knew Jesus had been murdered. They had fled in fear, Peter had even denied Him three times. Even after the resurrection, they had met behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. These men would need overwhelming evidence to convince them to show the courage that would be needed to confront the very authorities who had killed Jesus and fulfill their coming duty to spread the message.

This event occurred at the Sea of Tiberias, another name for the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had returned to Galilee as Jesus had instructed them to do (Matt. 28:7,10,16; Mark 16:7).

Present on this occasion were Peter, Thomas (the one who doubted), Nathanael (see chap. 1), James and John (the sons of Zebedee), and two others who are not named. That makes seven men in all who acted as witnesses to this event. This information serves to confirm that John spoke the truth. Note that the fact the sons of Zebedee are not named is a further indication that John is the author. He names other apostles present but refuses to name himself, just as he has done throughout the book.

21:3 - Peter determines to go fishing, and the others accompany him

The men had apparently returned to their homes. More than a week had passed since Jesus' resurrection (20:26). Perhaps their food supply was running low. They had no particular occupation to keep them busy. They were not traveling with Jesus preaching, as they had been before the crucifixion. Peter, decisive as ever, decided to go fishing, and the others went with him.

The first night out they caught nothing. Night seems to be a preferred time to fish on that sea.

Some claim that this story indicates the apostles had ceased dedicating their lives to Jesus and decided to return to their former lives. This could be, but it is speculation since the Scriptures do not say it. The disciples had seen Jesus, so they presumably believed in His resurrection; Thomas had seen such convincing evidence that he had confessed Jesus to be Lord and God. They may simply have been in need of some means of support until they knew what Jesus wanted them to do. Maybe they did not understand that He had work for them to do. Regardless of their motives, they had clearly returned to their former occupations and needed to be called from it again to do the Lord's work. Peter especially needed reassurance that Jesus still had a plan for him, since he had failed his Lord so miserably.

21:4-6 - Jesus instructs them how to find fish

In the morning Jesus appeared to them, but they did not recognize Him. Being morning, the light might be weak; perhaps the sea was even misty or foggy. They were some one hundred yards away from Him (v8). And doubtless, they were not expecting to see Him there.

He asked if they had any food, and they said they had not. He told them to cast the net on the other side and they would find food. When they obeyed, they caught so many fish they could not draw the net in.

This is exactly what had happened the first time Jesus had called them to be His apostles (Luke 5:1-11). The point could not possibly be coincidence. It is clear that Jesus is in the process of re-commissioning them or calling them again to the work of preaching. They had forsaken Him at His arrest and had been grievously shaken in faith by the following events. They surely realized beyond doubt that they had thor-

oughly misunderstood His purpose. They needed to be challenged and dedicated again to the work He had for them.

21:7 - John recognizes Jesus, and Peter leaves to see Him

John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) recognized the significance of the sequence of events and told Peter that it was the Lord. Peter put on his outer coat and jumped into the water.

This seems to illustrate characteristic qualities of each man. John was perceptive, so he first recognized Jesus. Peter was impetuous, so he immediately took action. Yet, they were evidently close friends and were able to work well together in God's service despite (and perhaps because of) their differences.

Other translations say Peter was "naked" (Gk. γυμνος). But the NKJV and other translations (NASB, ASV footnote) show that the idea is not that he was completely unclothed but had removed his outer garment (see Vine; cf. 1 Sam. 19:24; Isaiah 20:2ff; John 13:4; Micah 1:8).

Being the impetuous Peter, when he realized it was Jesus on the shore he did not want to wait for the others. He put on the outer coat and swam and/or waded to Him. The others came in the boat (v8).

21:8-11 - Other disciples bring in the boat and the net full of fish

The other disciples came to shore in the boat. They were only 300 feet (100 yards) from shore, but they had the heavy net full of fish to drag. By the time they arrived, Peter was apparently already there (v11).

When they arrived, Jesus had already built a fire and put bread and fish on it. He told them to bring some of the fish they had caught, so Peter went and pulled the net to shore. It was full of 153 large fish, yet it had not broken.

There was obviously something miraculous or surely noteworthy about this number of large fish, else why did they count them and why did John record the number? As professional fishermen, they evidently knew how unusual such a catch would be, especially after they had caught nothing all night. But simply by casting on the other side of the boat as Jesus said, they caught a number that was obviously remarkable. The catch was so great they could not bring the net into the boat.

This was intended as a sign. It surely reminded them of the very similar event that occurred the time when Jesus had called them to catch men (Luke 5).

21:12,13 - Jesus invited them to eat with Him

Jesus invited them to come and eat breakfast. The disciples did not have to ask who He was because they knew. He had not told them who He was, yet even under such unusual circumstances they knew. He gave them bread and fish to eat.

The circumstance of the fish surely reminded them of the time when He had called them to follow Him and become fishers of men. And their close association with Him, often eating meals with Him as they traveled together in His preaching work, left no doubt now who He was. As in other appearances, however, by eating with them He was proving to them that He was truly and physically alive again (cf. Luke 24:40-43). Peter later specifically mentions eating with Jesus as evidence of His resurrection - Acts 10:41.

“Breakfast” (Gk. ἀριστᾶω) is translated “break your fast” in some translations. But the idea does not indicate they had been fasting religiously. But they had been out all night without food. This was their first meal of the day and they were hungry (see Vine).

21:14 - John records that this was Jesus' third appearance to His disciples after His resurrection

Clearly, this means the third time He appeared to a group consisting primarily of the eleven apostles, those who would be His special witnesses. Specifically, it was the third time Jesus had appeared to the group John was part of. He obviously is not counting the appearances to Mary and the other women, etc. The previous two times were recorded in John 20:19-23 and 20:24-29.

21:15-17 - Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, and challenges him to feed His sheep

This conversation is an interesting study. There is a distinct play on Greek words here, which is not obvious in the English, but some translations add footnotes to make the distinction.

The first two times Jesus asked Peter if He loved (ἀγαπᾶω) Him, and Peter replied that he loved (φιλεῶ) Him. The third time Jesus asked Peter if he loved (φιλεῶ) Him, and Peter replied that Jesus knew he loved (φιλεῶ) Him because Jesus knows all things. Each time, Jesus told Peter to feed or tend His sheep or lambs.

Notes on the words for “love”:

Gk. ἀγαπᾶω is the form of love God has toward all men and which He commands His children to have for Him, for one another, and for all other people, including their enemies. It is not an emotional love based on natural attraction to the loveliness of the one loved. Rather it emphasizes the **choice** of the one who loves. It is an attitude of good will and concern for the needs and well being of the one loved. It is a willful choice, not a natural emotional response (Matt. 5:43-48).

We naturally feel affection and a desire to help people who attract us by their delightful character or who do nice things for us. We deem them admirable and worthy of our concern. But that is not ἀγαπᾶω. Instead, ἀγαπᾶω is a concern for the welfare of those who may have no natural attraction to us but may in fact be repulsive. Nevertheless, we

choose to be concerned for them. Sometimes, even when people do seem admirable to us, we may find that it is difficult to do what love requires. See Matt. 22:39 for a good illustration.

This love is a motivating quality that leads to action. It is a desire to do what is helpful or useful for another. One who has this love will therefore **act** when the object of the love needs action. One who does not so act, does not truly have this love (1 John 4:10; 5:3; etc.).

Greek φιλεω, however, is love from a natural attraction and affection. It may involve concern and a desire to help, but the reason for this desire is natural attraction rather than choice. In short, the cause of φιλεω lies in the one loved, whereas the cause of αγαπαω lies in the one who loves. One has φιλεω because the object of the love is so attractive or appealing that we naturally appreciate his character and good qualities so we respond kindly. One has αγαπαω because the lover chooses to seek the well being of the one loved, regardless of whether or not he acts in a way that is attractive or pleasing.

The compelling desire to **act** for the good of the one loved is not emphasized in φιλεω as much as in αγαπαω. φιλεω involves an admiration and respect so we may enjoy someone's company, whereas αγαπαω involves a responsibility whereby we recognize duties we must fulfill.

Notes on other words:

“Feed” (Gk. βοσκω) refers to providing nourishment as a herdsman does for his flock (Matt. 8:30,33; Mark 5:11,14; Luke 8:32,34; 15:15; see Vine).

“Tend” (Gk. ποιμαινω) means to act as a shepherd (Luke 17:7; 1 Cor. 9:7; Matt. 2:6), and is the word elsewhere used for elders (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28; Jude 12). It is a more inclusive word than βοσκω. It includes not just providing nourishment but also providing oversight, discipline, and guidance (see Vine). (See also Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15.)

“Lambs” (Gk. αρνιον) is a diminutive meaning, though this significance is not always present (see Vine).

“Sheep” (Gk. προβατιον) is a diminutive of προβατον (the diminutive showing endearment). It originally meant any small cattle, whether sheep or goats, but in the New Testament is used only for sheep (Matt. 12:11,12; 10:6; 26:31; John 10:1-27; Heb. 13:20; Matt. 25:33; 7:15; 10:16; 9:36; 6:34; Acts 8:32; Rom. 8:36; 1 Peter 2:25. See Vine).

Observations and conclusions

When Jesus had first called the apostles, they were fishing (Luke 5:1-11 and parallels). Now they were again fishing, and apparently very uncertain about what they were to do with their lives. Jesus was here preparing them for the fact that He was about to call them again,

rededicate, or recommission them to the work He has for them. He still had special work for them, so He called them again as He had at first.

Before giving them the commission, however, He confirmed (both to themselves and to us as we read the record) their attitude of devotion and commitment to Him. This was especially important for Peter, because he had boasted of great things but had terribly fallen by denying Jesus three times. He was probably more disillusioned and shaken by the events of the crucifixion than any of them.

Catholics teach that Jesus spoke to Peter here to make him the chief shepherd or Pope of the church. However, nothing here or elsewhere implies any such meaning. All apostles and elders were responsible to “tend the flock” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2 — in the latter passage Peter identifies himself as a “fellow-elder”). No passage indicates Peter had more authority than other apostles (Gal. 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 11:5; see notes on Matt. 16:18,19). Peter had denied Jesus three times. So Jesus here addressed Peter and required him to confess Him three times.

“Lovest thou me more than these” — The Greek for “these” is indefinite and could refer to the aspects of fishing (boat, nets, etc.) or to the other disciples. In the first idea, Jesus would be asking whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved his former occupation. Was he willing to give up that occupation and serve Jesus?

The second idea would ask whether Peter would again claim a deeper devotion to Jesus than the other apostles had. He had once made this claim. Did he still claim it? (John 13:37; Luke 22:31-34; Mark 14:29-31; Matt. 26:33-35)

Either concept fits the context, but I prefer the second. The context seems to allude to Peter’s denials. This explains why Jesus addressed His questions to Peter and why He asked three times (three confessions for three denials). Peter had confidently boasted that he would serve Jesus even when others would not. This had led directly to Jesus’ statement that Peter would deny Him three times. Jesus here questioned whether Peter still claimed greater love than others had, and this led to three confessions. Besides, it seems to demean a noble word to use *αγαπω* to refer to fishing equipment.

Peter’s responses show he has been cured of his over-confidence. Rather than overstate his devotion to Jesus as he had done previously, he stated a lesser degree of devotion than even Jesus asked. Jesus asked if Peter had the deep commitment of *αγαπω*, but Peter confessed only the lesser commitment of *φιλεω*: admiration, affection, and a desire for companionship.

He affirmed that the Lord knew what love he had. This shows that Peter had learned that the Lord knew Peter’s heart better than Peter himself did. The last time they had this conversation, Peter had affirmed great dedication but Jesus knew better. This time Peter admitted that the Lord knows best.

Each time Jesus asked the question, He lowered the degree of commitment. First, He asked if Peter loved (αγαπαω) Him more than others loved Him. Then He just asked if Peter loved (αγαπαω) Him (no comparison to others). Then he just asked if Peter loved (φιλεω) Him. Peter responded with a lower degree of commitment than Jesus asked for till Jesus finally came down to the level Peter was willing to admit.

The last time Jesus questioned him, Peter was grieved. Jesus was clearly questioning Peter's commitment to Him. This was distressing, especially when repeatedly questioned. But the most distressing point surely was that Peter saw the connection to the previous discussions and to his denial of Jesus. He was grieved when he had denied Jesus, yet now he had to face Jesus and be questioned about it, even in the presence of the others. He had been greatly humbled by what happened. He would not again venture to claim superior devotion, but simply admitted that he admired and respected Jesus.

It might seem that Jesus was being hard on Peter to bring up his past error. But in reality, he was restoring Peter spiritually. Forgiveness requires acknowledging our errors (Luke 17:3,4; 1 John 1:8,10). Had Jesus left the earth without ever bringing this up, Peter would have been plagued throughout his life with the memory of his error and the knowledge that he had never made it right while he had the opportunity before Jesus left the earth. By bringing it up Himself, Jesus brought the matter into the open so it could be forever resolved and Peter could be restored to service, confident that his Lord desired him to serve as a shepherd of His people alongside the other apostles.

Likewise when a Christian sins today, the Lord expects us to bring the matter up to him, not to ignore it – Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20; Luke 17:3,4; etc. Only in this way can the sinner be restored in his relationship to us and to God. To ignore the matter leaves it unresolved both in our minds and in his. By discussing it, we leave everyone reassured that all is made right and forgiven. But this must be done with sincere concern for the sinner, as Jesus did it here.

“Feed my lambs” implies Jesus was calling Peter again to dedicate himself to the work Jesus had called him to do. Jesus' disciples would need spiritual nourishment and guidance. (“Lambs” or “sheep” may refer to new converts, but seems more likely to be terms of affection for all disciples.) Peter had failed once in the work Jesus gave him. Jesus now called him to go back to work, but reminded him first that he needed the commitment of love to be successful. This was no greater responsibility than the other apostles had. Peter is singled out, not because he would have a greater position, but because he had committed a greater and more obvious sin. He needed to be restored to his position of responsibility along with the other apostles.

Note that Peter affirmed that Jesus knows all things, including what is in the heart. This is a great confession that we should all appre-

ciate. Jesus does know all things, but could only do so if He is God (see notes on 2:24,25). Unless Jesus is Deity, He should have corrected Peter for this.

It is also interesting to compare Peter to Moses and to elders (1 Tim. 3:6). Moses desired a place of leadership in God's service before he was ready for it. He did not see his own impetuousness and weakness (Ex. 2:11-15). He thought he was ready, but God knew he was not. God had to humble him first (Acts 7:25; Ex. 4:1-17). Later, God thought Moses was ready, but Moses was so lowly he did not think he could do it. A similar change appears to have occurred in Peter. This is likewise why elders should not be appointed when they are young and inexperienced.

21:18,19 - Jesus predicts Peter's death

Having called Peter to return to work for Him, Jesus predicted the manner of Peter's death. This also connects to the earlier discussion in which Peter had affirmed he would die rather than deny Jesus. Having renewed his call to Peter to work for Him, Jesus here affirmed that Peter would indeed die for Him.

He described how Peter, while young, could clothe himself and go wherever he chose to go. Later (at the time of his death — v19), he would be girded by someone else and would go to places where he did not want to go. Barnes and Clarke say this refers to the common custom of binding men in a yoke and chains on the way to be crucified. Or it could refer to stretching out on the cross and being carried to the place of crucifixion. History says Peter was crucified, but chose to die upside-down because he did not count himself worthy to die upright as his Master had. In any case, John states it refers to Peter's death and the fact he would die as a consequence of his service to Jesus.

Jesus then gave Peter the charge to dedicate himself to His service. "Follow me" (see also v22). This is the same call Jesus had given to the apostles the first time He had called them. He was renewing His call to them to work for Him. (Matt. 4:20,22; 8:22; 16:24; 9:9; Mark 1:18,20; 2:14; Luke 5:11,27,28; 9:59; John 1:43) By following Jesus to work as He worked, they would also follow Him to die as He died (cf. 13:33,36).

Jesus had called on them before to follow Him, but all had instead forsook Him. Peter had even denied Him. Now He calls on them again to follow Him, knowing that persecution and even death await. The disciples, especially Peter, needed to know that great challenges lay ahead. They had failed before. They must not fail again. And doubtless they were motivated by their greater understanding of Jesus' teachings and by their past failures. All remained true to their commission, and Peter in particular faced great opposition as recorded in the book of Acts, yet withstood it all with great courage and conviction.

King points out that John would have written this prediction after it had been fulfilled. John spoke as an eyewitness, having heard the prophecy made. But to recall this must have been very sad for John. He and Peter had been very close, as is shown by the many special events they had shared in Jesus' service. Surely, it pained him to remember Jesus' prediction of the death of his close friend and spiritual companion, knowing that it had been fulfilled.

(It is possible, according to v20, that they were physically walking at this time; but surely the parallel passages and the context show that Jesus here meant much more than physical following.)

21:20-23 - Peter asks regarding Jesus' will regarding John

Peter saw John following (the one who had leaned at Jesus' breast at the last supper and asked who would betray Him — 13:25). Peter asked what about that disciple. The context, Jesus' reply, and the interpretation given it (v23) indicate that probably he was asking how John would die. Jesus had said Peter should follow despite facing a violent death, so Peter asked what was ahead for John. Perhaps this was curiosity or perhaps it was intended to call attention away from Peter for awhile.

Jesus said that the answer to this question was irrelevant to Peter. He should follow Jesus regardless of what happened to John. In fact, if Jesus decided that John would remain till Jesus' return, that would make no difference to Peter.

This shows that we should not be so concerned about other people's service as we sometimes are. We should want others to obey God, but whether they do so or not, we should be faithful. What others do or do not do is no excuse for us. Too often we are so concerned about what other people do, right or wrong, and what will happen to others, good or bad, that we neglect to place the needed emphasis on our own service to God. Jesus corrected that tendency in Peter. He said it was not essential for Peter to know what would happen to John. What should concern Peter was that Peter be faithful. And what should concern me is that I remain faithful.

A mistaken opinion about John's future.

John adds that, as a result of Jesus' saying, some people thought John would never die, however that is not what Jesus said. He said, "***If*** I will..." Jesus really said nothing about John's future. He simply reminded Peter that what happened to John should have no effect on what Peter did in Jesus' service. Note that Mormons still claim that Jesus predicted John would never die, despite the clear affirmation of John himself that this is not what Jesus had said. In fact, such speculation is exactly what Jesus was telling Peter not to do! He said to follow Him and not be so concerned about the future of others. But disciples then and Mormons today do it anyway!

Johnson's view is that what Jesus really referred to was the fact that He would come to John on the isle of Patmos and give him the message that John eventually wrote in the book of Revelation. So, instead of dying as martyrs, as the other apostles would, John would tarry long enough to see Jesus come as described in Revelation. History records that John was the only one of the apostles to die a natural death.

King points out that, in any case, Jesus did not satisfy Peter's curiosity about John's future. Like the disciples who thought Jesus said John would never die, many people today have a seemingly unlimited ability to speculate about future events, especially regarding the book of Revelation and about Jesus' second coming. They go on and on with their unfounded opinions about such matters. Jesus' warning to them would be the same as what He gave to Peter: What is important is following Jesus and doing His will now. We do not need to know all the answers to questions about future events, and over-emphasis on such matters can lead us to neglect our present service to God.

This also illustrates the problem of rumors and idle speculation about God's word. It shows the possibility of drawing *unnecessary* inferences from Divine statements. It also shows the importance of respecting Divine conditions. The word "*if*" can completely change the meaning of a statement.

And finally, John's statement shows that Scripture should never be viewed as legend or rumor. On the contrary, it denies and opposes rumor. John makes clear that he is correcting rumor, not spreading it. Those who claim that the New Testament writers were just repeating legends need to deal with passages such as this. In fact, in v24 John makes clear that his record was eyewitness testimony.

21:24 - John assures us that he writes firsthand testimony

As John concludes his record, he affirms that he is "that disciple" — i.e., the one mentioned in v23. The author is that disciple whom Jesus loved, who laid on His breast and asked who would betray Him, as in v20. This connects to all the other passages regarding the disciple whom Jesus loved. See introductory notes.

He affirms further that his record is testimony, and his testimony is true. Throughout the book John has emphasized testimony. He is presenting evidence like a witness in a trial. Much of what he has recorded has been personal, firsthand testimony. He was personally present and saw Jesus' trial, death, and appearances after His resurrection, as well as most of His miracles. He was with Jesus throughout most of His ministry.

Contrary to the claims of many critics, the records of Jesus' life and of the early church history are not hearsay, let alone are they legends handed down for generations. On the contrary, most of them are personal, firsthand eyewitness testimony. And what is not firsthand

testimony is nevertheless a historical record obtained from those who were eyewitness.

21:25 - Finally John concludes by saying Jesus did many other things he did not write about

If everything Jesus ever did was written down, so many books would result that the world could not hold them. There is much more evidence of who He is and what He did.

However, as John affirmed in 20:30,31, we do not need that additional evidence. Sometimes people claim that we need further revelation or more evidence today because the Bible does not give all we need. The writers, however, said that enough has been written that we can have eternal life. This means there is no need for additional revelation. As long as we have the Bible, we have all we need to be saved and go to heaven.

The Scriptures provide us to all good works (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The Holy Spirit gave the apostles all truth (John 16:13), and they recorded all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing more is needed. If the other things Jesus did were written, they would add nothing new that is necessary to salvation. We would just have more examples of the same kind of things and the same teachings repeated.

John did his work and did it well. We can be saved if we believe in Jesus and obey His teachings as recorded in the New Testament. The question for us is what decision we will make. God sent Jesus to live a sinless life and die for us. The Holy Spirit revealed the message and inspired men recorded it. Now the decision is ours.

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