

THE MAN WHO WAS EQUAL TO GOD

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Someone claims to be “religious” or “spiritual” yet does not worship Christ. According to this passage, where does that leave them?**

We need to be careful not to be arrogant as we communicate this truth, but it is a biblical truth that Jesus makes *exclusive* truth claims. He is the way and no one comes to the father but through Him. Without Him you don't have much, actually you have nothing. To neglect Him is to neglect all.

Rather than make us prideful, this should spur us on to spread the gospel that all men may hear as clearly as possible about Jesus and who He is.

- 2. What are some of the extremely bold claims Jesus is making in this passage? If they aren't true, what does that say about him?**

He's equal with God. God is his father. He has the right to judge the whole world. He has the ability and privilege to raise the dead. That he can give life, and to whom he pleases.

If these things aren't true he's either a liar or a lunatic. It makes no sense to halfway accept Jesus as a “wise teacher.” These sorts of statements he makes leave no room for such.

- 3. Scripture, especially New Testament scripture, places a *heavy* emphasis on physical resurrection (Daniel 12:1-2, John 5, Rom 8:23, 1 Cor 15, 1 Thess 4:13-17, Phil 3:20-21). Why don't we emphasize it more?**

It's a long way off (we think). Because our thinking is contaminated by Platonism and even Gnostic ideas about the separation of the spiritual and physical. I've harped on this a lot. Jesus will raise our *bodies* (Ro 8:23, Phil 3:21). I'm not saying they will be the same, we will have a *soma pneumatikon*, a “body powered by the Spirit” as 1 Cor 15 tells us, but we will not be disembodied spirits.

- 4. Compare John 5:29 with Daniel 12:1-2 and Revelation 20:11-15. Does John 5:29 contradict the idea of grace? Are these people earning their salvation? Is this passage one of “assurance” or “warning” for the Christian?**

See attached commentaries for more info. Remember to take the whole counsel of scripture. Salvation by works even contradicts the rest of the gospel of John, so that's not what He's saying. But the point is one that Christian people sometimes neglect: those who are Christ's are changed—they live life differently. Parts of Chap 5 are an assurance (you serve a Lord who is sovereign over all creation with power to give life) but also a warning (he's given authority by the Father and he is L-O-R-D!).

5. How have you already been “raised from the dead” in some sense?

If our baptism is being buried with Christ then we have been raised a new man (Ro 6:4, Col 2:12) Jesus says we have been brought from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).¹

Some Christians have used these truths to complete spiritualize or make symbolic the resurrection and deny a bodily resurrection. That is not what we are trying to do, rather this is yet another example of the “already but not yet” nature of the Kingdom.

6. What “hyperlink” does the phrase “Son of Man” represent for the average Jewish person at the time of Jesus?

Sometimes it just means “human” (see Ezekiel 2:1). However saying THE Son of Man, and using it like a title strongly evokes Dan 7:9-14. This is the title of the divine-human figure that Daniel prophesied about.

7. What (or who) does Jesus say testifies to his identity?

John the Baptist, His Works, the Scriptures

8. The Pharisees are so obsessed with keeping their Sabbath traditions that they don’t recognize the God of the Sabbath. How can we do the same? Is it possible to be so engrossed in “bible study” that you don’t recognize Jesus Christ in the Word?

Yes. Unfortunately so.

¹ As a side note: I would argue that when you realize that your baptism in Christ is your first resurrection experience Rev 20:6 makes more sense (“*Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*”).

The Claims (John 5:19–47)

In response to their accusations, Jesus made three significant claims that proved His sonship.

He claimed to be equal with God (vv. 19–23). Instead of denying their accusation, He endorsed it! If today a man made this kind of a claim, we would conclude that he was joking or mentally disturbed. Jesus was certainly not insane, and there is every evidence that He was deadly serious when He spoke these words. Either He is what He claims to be, or He is a liar; and if He is a liar, how do you explain all the good He has done in the lives of needy people? Nobody wants to trust a liar; Jesus' disciples were willing to die for Him.

Jesus claimed to be one with His Father in *His works*. If healing a man on the Sabbath was a sin, then the Father was to blame! Jesus did nothing “of Himself” but only that which the Father was doing. The Father and the Son worked together, doing the same deeds in the same way. “I and the Father are One” (John 10:30).

When our Lord came to earth as man, He submitted Himself to the Father in everything. “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:9). He veiled His glory and laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him to use His divine powers for

Himself; but He refused to act independently. He was totally dependent on the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Not only did the Father show the Son His works and enable Him to do them, but the Father also shared His love (John 5:20). The first three Gospels open with the Father calling Jesus “My beloved Son,” and John echoed this statement in John 3:35. We usually think of the Father's love for the lost world, as in John 3:16; but we must also remember the Father's love for His dear Son.

Because the Father loves the Son, the Father shows Him His works. The blind religious leaders could not see what Jesus was doing, because they did not know the Father or the Son. In fact, even greater works were in the Father's plan, works that would cause them to marvel. Perhaps He had in mind the healing of Lazarus; for in John 5:21, He mentioned the raising of the dead.

For Jesus to claim to have power to raise the dead was a blasphemous thing in the eyes of the Jewish leaders; they gave that power to God alone. They said that Jehovah held the three great keys: the key to open the heavens and give rain (Deut. 28:12); the key to open the womb and give conception (Gen. 30:22); and the key to open the grave and raise the dead (Ezek.

37:13). As far as the Gospel records are concerned, Jesus had not yet raised anyone from the dead; so to make this claim was to invite even more opposition.

John 5:21 certainly can mean much more than the physical raising of people from the dead, for certainly Jesus was referring to His gift of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. He amplified this truth further as recorded in John 5:24–29.

So, Jesus claimed to be equal with the Father in His works, but He also claimed to be equal with the Father in *executing judgment* (John 5:22). To the orthodox Jew, Jehovah God was “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25); and no one dared to apply that august title to himself. But Jesus did! By claiming to be the Judge, He claimed to be God. “Because He [God] hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained” (Acts 17:31).

Our Lord claimed equality in another area, namely, *equal honor with the Father* (John 5:23). The fact that He is the appointed Judge should cause men to honor Him. What a tremendous claim: if you do not honor the Son, you are not honoring the Father! The “religious” people who say that they worship God, but who deny the deity of Christ, have neither the Father nor the Son! Apart

from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the Father, worship the Father, or serve the Father.

He claimed to have authority to raise the dead (vv. 24–29). For a second time, Jesus introduced His words with the solemn “verily, verily” (see John 5:19, 24–25). More than twenty times in John’s Gospel you will find Jesus using this solemn form of address. It is as though He was saying, “Pay attention to this! What I am about to say is important!”

In this fascinating paragraph, Jesus spoke about four different resurrections. He described the resurrection of lost sinners into eternal life (see John 5:24–25; Eph. 2:1–10). The lost sinner is as lifeless and helpless as a corpse. No matter how an undertaker may prepare a corpse, it is still dead; and no corpse is “deader” than any other corpse. If you are dead, you are dead! The lost sinner is helpless to save himself and he certainly cannot give himself life.

How are dead sinners raised from the dead? By hearing God’s Word and believing on God’s Son. Jesus healed the paralyzed man at the pool by His word (John 5:8). Each time He raised somebody from the dead, He spoke the word (Luke 7:11–17; 8:49–56; John 11:41–44). His Word is “living and powerful” (Heb. 4:12) and can raise sinners from spiritual

death. “Everlasting life” means that they can never die spiritually again, nor can they ever come into judgment ([Rom. 8:1](#)). To hear His Word and believe means salvation; to reject His Word means condemnation ([John 12:48](#)).

The second resurrection mentioned is the resurrection of our Lord Himself ([John 5:26](#)). Our life is derived, but His life is original, “in Himself.” “In Him was life” ([John 1:4](#)). The grave could not hold Him because He is “the Prince of Life” ([Acts 2:24](#); [3:15](#)). Jesus laid down His life and then took it up again ([John 10:17–18](#)). Because He has life in Himself, He can share that life with all who will trust Him.

The third resurrection named is the future resurrection of life, when believers are raised from the dead ([John 5:28–29a](#)). This wonderful truth is explained in [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#) and [1 Corinthians 15](#). Keep in mind that resurrection is not reconstruction. It does not imply that God “puts the pieces back together again.” The resurrection body is a new body, a glorified body, suited to the new heavenly environment. Death is not the end for the believer, nor will he live in heaven as a disembodied spirit. God saves the whole person, and this includes the body ([Rom. 8:23](#); [Phil. 3:20–21](#)). This resurrection of life will take place when

Jesus Christ returns in the air and calls His people to Himself.

The fourth resurrection He mentioned is the resurrection of condemnation ([John 5:29b](#)). This resurrection involves only the lost, and it will take place just before Jesus Christ ushers in the new heaven and the new earth ([Rev. 20:11–15](#)). What an awesome event that will be, when the dead “small and great” stand before Jesus Christ! The Father has committed all judgment to the Son ([John 5:22](#)) and has given Him the authority to execute judgment ([John 5:27](#)). Today Jesus Christ is the Saviour, but one day He shall sit as the Judge.

The title “Son of man” used in [John 5:27](#) refers to [Daniel 7:13–14](#) and is a definite messianic title. It is used twelve times in John’s Gospel and over eighty times in all four Gospels. The Jews would know this title from their reading of the Book of Daniel; and they would know that, by using it, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, and the Judge.

Believers will be given resurrection bodies so that they might reign with Christ in glory. Unbelievers will be given resurrection bodies—but not glorified bodies—that they might be judged and then suffer punishment in those bodies. Bodies that were used for sin will suffer the consequences of that sin.

The fact that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead is proof that He is equal with the Father, and therefore He is God.

He claimed that there are valid witnesses who support His claim to deity (vv. 30–47). The word *witness* is a key word in John’s Gospel; it is used forty-seven times. Jesus did bear witness to Himself, but He knew they would not accept it; so He called in three other witnesses.

The first was John the Baptist ([John 5:30–35](#)), whom the religious leaders had interrogated carefully ([John 1:15ff](#)). In fact, at the very end of His ministry, our Lord pointed the rulers back to the witness of John the Baptist ([Matt. 21:23–27](#)). John knew who Jesus was and faithfully declared what he knew to the people of Israel. John told the people that Jesus was the Lord ([John 1:23](#)), the Lamb of God ([John 1:29, 36](#)), and the Son of God ([John 1:34](#)).

John was a “burning and a shining lamp” (Jesus is the Light, [John 8:12](#)), and the Jewish people were excited about his ministry. However, their enthusiasm cooled; and nobody lifted a finger to try to deliver John when he was arrested by Herod. The leaders looked on John as a “local celebrity” ([Matt. 11:7–8](#)), but they did not want to receive his message of repentance. The publicans and sinners

accepted John’s message and were converted, but the religious leaders refused to submit ([Matt. 21:28–32](#)).

Whenever God raises up a spiritual leader who commands attention, there is always the danger of attracting people who want to bask in his popularity but not submit to his authority. A “mixed multitude” followed Moses and Israel out of Egypt, people who were impressed with the miracles but not yielded to the Lord. The prophets and Apostles, as well as the great leaders in church history, all had to put up with shallow people who followed the crowd but refused to obey the truth. We have them in churches today.

Our Lord’s second witness was the witness of His miracles ([John 5:36](#)). You will remember that John selected seven of these “signs” to include in his Gospel as proof that Jesus is the Son of God ([John 20:30–31](#)). Jesus made it clear that His works were the works of the Father ([John 5:17–20; 14:10](#)). Even Nicodemus had to admit that our Lord’s miracles identified Him as “sent from God” ([John 3:2](#)).

But the Bible also records miracles performed by ordinary men, such as Moses, Elijah, and Paul. Do these miracles prove that they are also sent of God? Yes, they do (see [Heb. 2:3–4](#)), but none of these men ever claimed to be the very Son

of God. No servant of God able to perform God's mighty works would ever claim to be God Himself. The fact that Jesus made this claim, backed up by His mighty works and perfect life, is evidence that His claim is true.

Jesus indicated that the Father gave Him a specific ministry to finish while He was here on earth. "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" ([John 17:4](#)). He was not only on a divine timetable, but He followed a divine agenda. He had specific works to accomplish in the Father's will.

Since the Old Testament Law required the testimony of two or three witnesses ([Num. 35:30](#); [Deut. 17:6](#)), the Lord met that requirement by giving three trustworthy witnesses.

The third and final witness our Lord summoned was *the Word of the Father* ([John 5:37-47](#)). The Jewish people highly revered the written Word of God, particularly the Law that was given through Moses. Moses heard God's voice and saw God's glory; but we have that same voice and glory in the inspired Word of God (see [2 Peter 1:12-21](#)). The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ, yet the people who received and preserved that Word were blind to their own Messiah. Why?

For one thing, they did not permit that

Word to generate faith in their hearts ([John 5:38](#)). [John 5:39](#) is probably a statement of fact and not a command and could be rendered: "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life." The Jewish scribes sought to know the Word of God, but they did not know the God of the Word! They counted the very letters of the text, but they missed the spiritual truths that the text contained.

Because of my radio ministry, I often receive letters from people who disagree with my interpretations or applications of Scripture; and sometimes these letters are quite angry. (I will not quote here the language I have seen in letters from professed Christians!) It is unfortunate when our "study" of the Bible makes us arrogant and militant instead of humble and anxious to serve others, even those who disagree with us. The mark of true Bible study is not knowledge that puffs up, but love that builds up ([1 Cor. 8:1](#)).

So, there was something wrong with *the minds* of these Jewish leaders: they did not see Christ in their own Scriptures (see [2 Cor. 3:14-18](#); [4:3-6](#)). But there was also something wrong with their *wills*: they would not trust in the Saviour. Because they did not have the Word in their hearts, they did not want Christ in their hearts. They were religious and self-

righteous, but they were not saved.

These leaders had a third problem, and this was the lack of love in their *hearts*. “Ye have not the love of God in you” ([John 5:42](#)). This means the experience of God’s love for them as well as their expression of love for God. They claimed to love God, but their attitude toward Jesus Christ proved that their love was counterfeit.

Their attitude toward God’s Word hindered their faith, but so also did their attitude toward themselves and one another. The Pharisees enjoyed being honored by men (see [Matt. 23:1–12](#)) and they did not seek for the honor that comes from God alone. They did not honor the Son ([John 5:23](#)) because He did not honor them! Because they rejected the true Son of God who came in the Father’s name, they would one day accept a false messiah, the Antichrist, who would come in his own name ([John 5:43](#); and see [2 Thes. 2](#); [Rev. 13](#)). If we reject that which is true, we will ultimately receive that which is false.

Our Lord closed this penetrating sermon by warning the Jewish leaders that Moses, whom they honored, would be their judge, not their savior. The very Scriptures that they used to defend their religion would one day bear witness against them. The Jews *knew* what Moses wrote, but they did not really *believe* what he wrote. It is one thing to have the Word

in our hands or our heads, but quite another thing to have it in our hearts. Jesus is the Word made flesh ([John 1:14](#)), and the written Word bears witness to the Incarnate Word. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” ([Luke 24:27](#)).

The witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the divine miracles, and the witness of the Word of God all unite to declare that Jesus Christ is indeed One with the Father and the very Son of God.

Our Lord was not intimidated by the accusations of the religious leaders. If you check a harmony of the Gospels, you will see that after the events recorded in [John 5](#), Jesus deliberately violated the Sabbath again! He permitted His disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath, and He healed a man with a withered hand ([Matt. 12:1–14](#)). These events probably took place in Galilee, but the news would certainly reach the leaders in Jerusalem and Judea.

The healing of the man on the Sabbath would come up again ([John 7:21–23](#)). The leaders would persist in protecting tradition instead of understanding truth (see [Mark 7:1–13](#)). But before we judge them, perhaps we ought to examine our own lives and churches. Are we permitting religious tradition to blind us to the truth

of God's Word? Are we so involved in "Bible study" that we fail to see Jesus Christ in the Word? Does our knowledge of the Bible give us a "big head" or a "burning heart"?

5:19–24 The second response of Jesus in this conflict exchange involves two of the twenty-five uses of the double *amēn* (lit., “truthfully, truthfully, I say to you”; **5:19, 24**) sayings in John. The use of this form is an obvious Johannine signal that the words are extremely important in the understanding of Jesus and his ministry. But the reader should notice that at this point (**5:19**) the story moves away from dialogue to monologue. The reader, therefore, receives the impression of being in a courtroom scene where Jesus is delivering an address that is a kind of combination defense summation and judge’s decision.

Although the Jews had focused their hostility on the equality aspect of Jesus’ relation to the Father (**5:18**), Jesus countered their anger by highlighting his dependency on the Father (**5:19**). Here then are two perspectives about Jesus: the powerful divine Son of God and the humble Messenger of God. Christian theology always struggles with these two aspects (sometimes called the two *personae*) of Jesus. The dangerous tendency today of some is to de-emphasize the divine exalted nature, and the tendency of others is to de-emphasize the self-effacing human nature of Jesus. The key is to find the balance between the

two. The quest for this key was evident in the early Christological debates and the ensuing attempts to formulate the early creeds.²⁹

The meaning of the first double *amēn* saying concerning the dependence of the Son on the Father is explained in four statements introduced by the Greek connective *gar* in vv. **19, 20, 21, 22**.³⁰ The first *gar* (“because” in the NIV) reminds the reader that the Father is the model for the Son’s activity (**5:19**). The point is that the Son copied the Father. Paul employed a similar idea in the theme of imitation to suggest that Christians were to copy him and his model of authentic life (cf. **Phil 3:17; 1 Cor 4:16**) as he copied or imitated Christ (**1 Cor 11:1**).

The second *gar* (“For” in the NIV) identifies the basis for the Son’s dependence, namely, “the Father loves the Son” (**5:20**).

²⁹ For a brief summary of the formulation of the early Christological creeds see G. W. Bromiley, “Christology,” *ISBE*, particularly at 1.663–64. For references related to the early creeds concerning Christology see H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 42–63.

³⁰ For a helpful treatment of the uses of γάρ in these verses see the discussion of Carson, *John*, 250–54.

This love of the Father for the Son is one of the foundational building blocks of Christian theology. Some theories of the atonement tend to minimize this pervading love of God when seeking to explain the reason for the death of Jesus. For John no theory of the atonement would be adequate that would treat lightly the love of God for the Son in dealing with the wrath of God. Failure to account satisfactorily for God's love of the Son can greatly damage our theological understanding of God's love for the people of the world (3:16). Inherent in the love of the Father is the desire of the Father to reveal to the Son all the activity of God. The use of the Greek verb *deiknuein* (meaning "show" or "reveal") twice in v. 20 is John's way of indicating the intimate relation between the Father and Jesus. As God's agent, Jesus received direct insight from the Father and acted in accordance with the Father's wishes. The actions of Jesus, therefore, were the actions of the Father because in Jesus the Father was in fact acting. One of the great heresies among Christians is to split Jesus from God in such a way that somehow God does not participate in the work (and death) of Jesus. However one interprets the great mystery of the incarnate work of Jesus, it

must never be separated from the fact that Jesus was the agent of God. The surprising revelation to humanity is that greater works were to be revealed through the Son, undoubtedly related to salvation (5:20). Readers of John will also recall the striking similar statement that comes in the Farewell Cycle to the effect that believers would "do even greater things" because Jesus was returning to the Father (14:12). That statement should again be related to the expansion of God's working in the world—God's mission through believers, who are to pattern their lives on Jesus, the model agent of God.

It is important to recognize a significant fact concerning the Johannine use of the words for "love" in this Gospel. The verb for the Father's love of the Son in 5:20 is not *agapān*, as some might expect, but *philein*. Many well-meaning proclaimers of the gospel have made some strategic linguistic errors in referring to Greek words and in seeking to root theological differences in linguistic distinctions for "love" particularly in the message of John 21 (see my discussion there). The two verbs for love (*agapān* and *philein*) are virtually interchangeable in John.³¹

The third appearance of *gar* (“for” in the NIV, 5:21) serves as an illustration of the working dependence of the Son upon the Father’s example. Among the unique characteristics of God in the Old Testament, perhaps none is more significant than God as the Life-giver. It is God who breathed into the first human the breath of life, and that is the reason the mortal who was formed from the dirt is a “living being” (*nepeš hayyâ*, Gen 2:7). In the sacrificial system, the covenant, and in the

³¹ It is also well to be aware that some sermons on *agapē* and *eros* as well as on *chronos* and *kairos* are likewise linguistically flawed. Ministers must also be careful what they do with their sermons on *agapē* and *eros*. A. Nygren mistakenly tried to root a theological motif study in a linguistic distinction (*Agape and Eros*, trans. P. Watson [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953]). The error that many ministers make is the failure to recognize that *eros* is never used in the NT. But one must not assume therefore that unworthy self-centered love is not discussed in the NT. For a necessary corrective see J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1961). A similar problem often appears in the ministerial use of the words for time. See also the critique of Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Nashville: Alec R. Allenson, 1962).

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

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dietary laws of the Torah, blood was the symbol of life. It had to be treated specially because “the life was in the blood,” and life was the particular concern of God (e.g., Gen 9:4; Exod 24:6–8; Lev 17:11; Deut 12:16). To make a person live was the prerogative of God and his special servants like Elijah (1 Kgs 17:21–24). But according to John, Jesus is not merely a servant of God who acts for God like Elijah. Instead, the evangelist proclaims, “In him was life” (John 1:4). Raising a person from the dead therefore was a sign of the presence of God. The signs in the Festival Cycle (the healing of the lame man, the feeding of the multitude, and the giving of sight to the blind man) point toward the resurrection sign of Lazarus (the last sign in the Festival Cycle). Moreover, they all serve as an introduction to the ultimate sign of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the confirmation of his uniqueness. Jesus was truly the agent or special representative of God on earth. Here the mention of the Son’s life-giving power (5:21) prepares the reader for the discussion of two resurrections in vv. 28–29.

The fourth appearance of *gar* (“Moreover” at 5:22 in the NIV) moves the focus of attention to the implications of the Son’s dependence. The absolute depen-

dence of the Son upon the Father means that the decision-making process or evaluation has been given to the Son. As a result, the Father does not need to judge (5:22). The basis for judgment had already been suggested earlier, namely believing in the Son (cf. 3:18). The meaning of *krinein* (judge) can vary slightly in John depending on the context, although the threat of negative consequences is never far away. In 3:18 *krinein* should appropriately be rendered “condemn” because a negative judgment is in mind. Here (5:22) there is a sense of impartial evaluation in focus. But in 5:24 the negative sense of “condemnation” clearly reappears in the use of the noun form *krisis*.

The rationale for judgment being given to the Son is so that all persons might properly recognize (“honor,” *timān*) the Son as they do the Father (5:23). The clarity of the Father and the Son is forcefully indicated here by the fact that failure to give proper respect (honor) to the Son means failure to respect the Father. The Son was the authentic agent of the Father and therefore should have been treated accordingly. 🗨️

As this portion of the argument was begun with a double *amēn* saying at 5:19, so it has been neatly packaged to form an

inclusio with a concluding double *amēn* statement in 5:24. Just as it was said in 3:18 that believing in the Son determines one’s relation to condemnation, so likewise here it is reasserted that hearing and believing (two components of genuine obedience) in the sent one (Jesus) are determinative for eternal life or escaping condemnation. Life is here defined as a person having “crossed over from death to life.” According to Bultmann, this means the abandonment of an old physical eschatological perspective and the finding of “authenticity of existence, granted in the illumination which proceeds from man’s ultimate understanding of himself.”³² There is a partial truth in such an existential understanding of this text. The basic problem is not what it affirms but what it rejects. This text definitely emphasizes the present reality of salvation. But that is only half the story. The other half is presented in the next section (5:28–29), which Bultmann regarded as a later insertion.³³

5:25–29 This section begins with another double *amēn* saying that highlights the twofold eschatological perspec-

³² Bultmann, *John*, 258.

³³ *Ibid.*, 260–61.

tive in John. Some translators (cf. NIV) and commentators place the paragraph break at v. 24, but the shift is more likely at v. 25. The other paragraphing produces a choppy thought pattern.

The use of the term *nekroi* for “the dead” in v. 25 means “dead bodies” and not merely some form of spiritual death. This concept is inherent in the Jewish understanding of resurrection, and it has been adopted in traditional Christian theology. The text thus introduces the theme of resurrection, which was briefly noted in v. 21. Moreover, this verse reminds the reader that when one thinks eschatologically as a Christian, one must be able to hold in tension the future (“coming”) and the present (“has now come,” the NIV reading for *nun estin*, “now is”³⁴).

³⁴ The presence of $\nu\upsilon\nu \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$ (lit., “now is”) does not imply that the eschatological era has fully come, as some existentialists would argue, but that some aspects of the *eschaton* were evident in the coming of Jesus, such as the decisive confrontation with the powers of evil and death. The classic distinction of O. Cullmann between D-Day and V-Day is an excellent illustration of how both the already and not yet of Christian eschatology are related (*Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson

The focus of 5:25 is definitely on the Johannine hour (*hōra*, the NIV “time” loses the thematic emphasis), which is primarily directed to Jesus’ hour of glorification (cf. John 17:1). But one must not read John on a single level. There are always overtones of other aspects of reality in this Gospel. Here the *eschaton* (the end) is also in view. The point is that the coming of Jesus indelibly touched the state of the dead, interpreted not merely from a spiritual perspective but from a physical perspective as well. 🗨️

The “voice” (*phonē*) of an eschatological figure (here the Son of God, 5:25) is a clear reminder of the voice of the judging God in Jewish apocalyptic writings³⁵ and is not unrelated to Paul’s “voice” (*phonē*) of the archangel and the trumpet at the end of time when the dead in Christ are

[Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950], 82–85, 140–41).

³⁵ The concept of the apocalyptic presence of God in “sound” appears in various forms, such as the threatening sound of God in the image of “many waters.” The voice of the judging God will stir fear in the hearts of those who will be found wanting at the end of time. See, e.g., O. Betz, “φωνή,” *TDNT*, especially at 9.285–86. For a brief discussion on “Voice” see N. J. Opperwall-Galluch, *ISBE* 4.997.

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

said to rise (1 Thess 4:16). To miss this sense of the eschatological voice is a failure to understand the way in which the evangelist deals with eschatology.

Having thus signaled the resurrection of the dead by reference to the call or voice, Jesus declared that God vested in him both the power of life (5:26; cf. 1:4) and the authority (*exousia*) to render judgment (5:27).³⁶ In the ultimate sense both of these qualities are characteristics of God alone. The parallelism between the Son and the Father is thus again asserted. Here it is in an eschatological sense. But it is imperative to recognize that however one may imagine the idea of equality (5:18) working in Johannine theology, there is never any hint of the Son being in charge of the Father. The Son is always recognized as having been sent by the Father, gifted by the Father, obedient to the Father, and ultimately glorifying the Father (cf. 5:23, 27, 30 6:44; 8:28–29; 17:1). He is the emissary of the Father. This fact is true even though Jesus is iden-

³⁶ The theme of the Father having given authority to the son, which was enunciated in the widest scope at 3:35 (“everything”), is here particularized in respect to eschatological authority.

tified as the eschatological Son of Man (5:27; cf. Dan 7:13; Matt 13:41; 24:30; 25:31).³⁷ In a causal sense that designation

³⁷ A great deal of literature has been penned on Son of Man theology. Some have argued that it merely means “man” as in God’s address to Ezekiel, particularly Ezek 20–39. It seems to have been a favorite designation of Jesus for himself according to the Synoptic Gospels. That use is suggested in John 1:51. While some have argued that the term is used simply as a replacement for the first-person singular (“I”), the term seems to be used in the Gospels as a means of suggesting that the messianic ideas are not to be confused with popular Jewish expectations but should be understood by reference to who Jesus in fact was. The use of the term “Son of Man” (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου) here, however, is unique in the Gospels because it is not used in the typical manner with the articles (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου). It would of course not need an article before υἱός as a predicate nominative (cf. the important example of θεός at John 1:1 and the discussion concerning the Jehovah’s Witnesses there). But the anarthrous use of both words here is best explained by the fact that the expression in the LXX of Dan 7:13 is similarly anarthrous. There the relationship of the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days parallels the relation of the Son and the Father in this text of John. For a discussion of this text see B.

argues for Jesus' right to the role of judge in the divine court, but that role never minimizes the stature of the Father. It is an eschatological role assigned by the Father to the Son. 

A major role of the Son in the eschatology of humanity is his issuance of this decisive call (*phonē*), which summons the dead from the tombs (5:28) to one of two destinies. In this decisive hour (*hōra*, the NIV again has "time") the division that takes place will be based on what people have "done" (5:29). Because that believing is often superficial (cf. 2:23–25), the integrity of believing is to be judged by a person's activity, not merely by what a person says.³⁸

The importance of human action as a litmus test of human commitment is a

Lindars, "The Son of Man in the Johannine Christology," in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and S. Smalley (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 43–57. For a more extended discussion on the Son of Man concept see C. Colpe, *TDNT* 8.400–477, and particularly on the twelve uses of the term in John at 8.464–72.

³⁸ For another view of this text see Z. Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John. Part 6: Those Who Have Done Good—John 5:28–29," *BSac* 136 (1979): 158–66.

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frequent message of the New Testament (e.g., Eph 2:10; Phil 2:12–13; 3:17–19; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Jas 2:14–17; 1 John 3:18; 4:20–21). Moreover, it is made the significant test in the judgment scene of the sheep and goats by Jesus (e.g., Matt 25:31–46) and at the judgment seat of Revelation (20:11–15). But many Christians apply only the assurance texts to themselves and exempt themselves from these passages, firmly convinced that the passages have no application to them. We should remember that the New Testament books were written primarily to Christians not to point the finger at others but to take the warnings of the Bible very seriously.³⁹ The alternative of resurrection to life or resurrection to judgment in this passage is both an assurance and a warning to every reader. The message of this text is actually a call to integrity with God and humanity. The opponents of Jesus were the religious persons of his day. The point of the discussion, there-

³⁹ The reason I wrote my book *Assurance and Warning* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987) is that I wanted Christians to take seriously both the assurances of God and the warnings of God. In the tension between the two lies the truth of salvation.

fore, is that Christian readers are called to understand clearly that opposition to Jesus or affirmation of Jesus and his ways have immense eschatological consequences. ✎

(4) A Transition in the Argument (5:30)

³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

5:30 The next verse serves as a conclusion to the role of Jesus as judge and prepares for the following section in which Jesus is pictured as a defense counsel. His dependence on the authority of the Father who sent him is reasserted from the earlier verses. But the focus moves from the overarching role of the Father in giving the Son his task to the acceptance by the Son of that task. Accordingly, the literary style changes. Jesus the speaker has been referring to himself as the Son. In this verse the style changes so that in the rest of the chapter he argues the case in the first-person singular. When that happens in the argument, the entire process is altered. ✎

This verse is a key to understanding that change. Notice the statements: “By myself,” “I can do nothing,” “I judge,” “I

hear,” “my judgment,” “I seek,” “not to please myself,” “who sent me.” Here are eight references in English (nine in Greek) to the first-person singular in a brief thirty-word Greek sentence. It is not difficult to recognize the tremendous shift that has occurred in the text. The movement in language should be a signal to interpreters of that change. In accepting his mission (“sent”) as judge, Jesus is portrayed as placing himself on the block of scrutiny for all to examine him. The issue therefore is defined. He claimed to be just, and his defense was that he had not compromised himself by pursuing self-interest. The case was therefore joined: Was he what he claimed to be? That is the question to be answered in the next section. ✎

(5) Jesus' Defense Statement and the Four Witnesses (5:31-47)

³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

³³ “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light,

and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. ³⁷And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹“I do not accept praise from men, ⁴²but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

⁴⁵“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would

believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

[5:31–32](#) The issue had been stated in [5:30](#). The defense here began with a restatement of the issue in preparation for the calling of witnesses.⁴⁰ There is first an admission of a presupposition that is based on the accepted legal code of the Torah, the foundation book of the Jews who were Jesus’ opponents. In cases where there is a need for verifiable testimony, it is necessary that there be two or three witnesses to provide corroboration of the matter (cf. [Deut 19:15](#)). That principle was expected to be firmly observed, particularly in capital cases ([Num 35:30](#); [Deut 17:6](#); cf. [Heb 10:28](#)), and that principle was accepted as a basic thesis by Jesus ([Matt 18:16](#); [John 8:17](#)) and by the early Christians like Paul ([2 Cor 13:1](#)).⁴¹ It was

⁴⁰ For a discussion of this text see U. von Wahlde, “The Witnesses to Jesus in John 5:31–40 and Belief in the Fourth Gospel,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 385–404.

⁴¹ It is interesting how that requirement of two or three witnesses is employed elsewhere, e.g., the two witnesses in [Rev 11:3](#) and the three witnesses in [1 John 5:8](#).

assumed that corroboration would assure the courts and others that the ninth word of the Decalogue ([Exod 20:16](#)) had been safeguarded because bearing false witness was regarded as an act of personal treason ([Prov 25:18](#)).

This passage opens, then, with Jesus' admission that if he was the sole witness to his claim, it could have been legitimately judged as false ([John 5:31](#)).⁴² The

⁴² See the Mishna at [Ketub. 2.9](#). Brown sees "a formal contradiction" here with [John 8:14](#) and thinks it doubtful that both texts could come from the same hand (*John*, 1.223–24). Both [5:31](#) and [8:14](#) deal with the question of witness on behalf of oneself. In the first case Jesus asserts that if he testified concerning himself, his witness would be untrue, whereas in the second case he asserted that even if he did testify concerning himself, it would be true. In the second case the issue concerns his place of origin, and in the first case the issue concerns his role as the agent of the Father. While Brown recognizes that in both instances Jesus' testimony can actually be verified by the Father ([5:36–37](#); [8:18](#)) and therefore any formal contradiction is resolved, nevertheless he doubts that the same person would have argued in the two different ways represented by [5:31](#) and [8:14](#). But I would remind the reader that for anyone who has engaged in

Greek, however, assumes that the condition itself is false and that the testimony is true. Accordingly, the witnesses are introduced. They are John ([5:33](#)), the works (not "work," the Greek is plural) of Jesus ([5:36](#)), the Father ([5:37](#)), and the Scriptures ([5:39](#)), particularly the laws of Moses ([5:45](#)). But before they are introduced separately, Jesus reminds his listeners that he has already indicated to them that there has been a joint testimony present in all his discussions. The "another" of v. [32](#) assumes that in everything Jesus has done, the Father has been active. The method of argument used here is to close down the doubt before the actual argument begins. As a former lawyer, given the presuppositions in the case, I find Jesus' method to be intriguing.



[5:33–35](#) The first stories of this Gospel

legal argument or debate, contexts are very crucial to the style of argument. In the first case Jesus employed the legal formula of the need for two witnesses to introduce his four witnesses, whereas in the second case he defended a Pharisaic charge of false witness to a proclamation concerning his origin. The format of both contexts are clearly conflictual, but the settings move the arguments in different ways.

involved John the Baptizer, whose role was defined as that of witness (1:7) and who uttered the first significant testimony concerning Jesus, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). In reintroducing this witness, the opponents were reminded that they had sought out John and that he “testified to the truth” (5:33). Their own investigation should have prepared them for this truth. But although they listened to John and willingly rejoiced (*ēthelēsate agalliathēnai*) during his hour (*hōra*), his burning testimony (5:35)⁴³ obviously had no lasting effect upon them.

The themes of witness, light, and truth

⁴³ In the Prologue the evangelist identifies the Word (λόγος) with “light” (φῶς, 1:4) and makes clear that John was not the light (1:8). Here in describing the Baptizer, the evangelist avoided calling him “light” and identified the Witness as “a lamp (λύχνος) that burned and gave light” (φωτί, 5:35). F. Neugebauer (“*Miszelle zu Joh 5:35*,” *ZNW* 52 [1961]: 130) suggested that the image here was a construct of the lamp symbol in Ps 132:17 (LXX 131:17), which was seen as a preparation “for my anointed one” (LXX, χριστῷ) who would engender “joy” among the “saints” (Ps 132:16). Cf. also Sir 48:1, which refers to Elijah as one who “burned as a lamp,” λαμπάς, or “torch”).

are all linked here in support of the claims of Jesus. But the reader is quickly reminded that the authority of Jesus is not dependent on human acknowledgment. If that were the case, then the hope of human salvation would be in trouble (5:34). But salvation is from God and is not based on mere human testimony.

5:36 So Jesus moves from human testimony to the more significant witness of his “works” (*erga*). This term is used in the Gospel to describe the powerful acts of Jesus done on earth in cooperation with the Father (5:36; cf. 5:20; 9:4; 10:25, 32, 37–38; 14:10–11; 15:24). These works are not to be seen as ends in themselves but testify to the fact that Jesus is on a mission (“sent”) from the Father.⁴⁴

5:37–38 The third witness Jesus calls to support his claim is the Father. This witness is admittedly difficult for the opponents to accept for at least two reasons. The first is that the reference to this witness is to God’s self, and human beings do not generally have direct contact with God through the physical senses of hear-

⁴⁴ Cf. von Wahlde, “The Witnesses to Jesus,” 386, 388, and H. Vanhoye, “*L’oeuvre du Christ, don du Père (Jn V, 36 at XVII, 4)*,” *RSR* 48 (1960): 377–419.

ing and seeing. Indeed, it is admitted in the prologue that no one but the Son has ever seen God (1:18), although there are references to descriptions of hearing and seeing God in the Old Testament.⁴⁵ But all of these statements are basically proximate descriptions of encounters with God by using human sense terms that are foundational to human thought. They

⁴⁵ God is said to have spoken with Noah (Gen 7:1ff.); Abraham (Gen 12:1ff.); Moses, when God called out of the bush (Exod 3:4) and the mountain (Exod 19:3ff.); Samuel (1 Sam 3:4); and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:12). Similarly, one might say that Abraham saw the Lord in the three men at the Oaks of Mamre (Gen 18:1–2); Jacob wrestled at night with the visitor near Jabbok (Gen 32:24ff.); the Lord is said to have spoken face-to-face with Moses (Exod 33:11); and Isaiah saw at least the robe of the Lord in the temple (Isa 6:1). These are just a few examples of statements that seem to imply physical sense perceptions. But they are not to be understood as more than God adapting to human sense perception. The familiar encounter of Isaiah in the temple is such an example. But there Isaiah seemingly is permitted to see God's long robe in the temple, and the seraphim apparently also do not look at God because they cover their faces (Isa 6:1–2).

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emphasize a relationship with God, who is in fact beyond the realm of full human comprehension or physical sensing.

But Jesus moved to a more basic second reason why his opponents would have difficulty accepting this testimony from the Father. Not only had they not “heard his voice nor seen his form,” but their problem was that “his word” was not “abiding” (*menein*, NIV “dwelling”) in them. The reason for this failure was laid by Jesus at their unwillingness to believe in him who was sent by the Father (5:38).

In other words, Jesus turned a defense into a charge. His testimony, he argued, would not work with them because they would not let it work. Accordingly, they were unable to experience the kind of encounters (“hear” and “see” God) that marked the lives of the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. The maxim that often has been applied to the post-Old Testament (intertestamental) era and could apply to these opponents was: There was no new word from God to them.⁴⁶ They

⁴⁶ R. H. Charles categorized the period following the OT canon and the development of the apocalyptic period by this designation. Cf. the similar idea at the time of Eli in 1 Sam 3:1 (see

relied on tradition and could not accept the testimony of the in-breaking of God into their lives.

5:39–40 The fourth witness Jesus called was the Scriptures, the foundation of his opponents' tradition. They spent their time "diligently study[ing] the Scriptures" (*eraunāte tas graphas*) because the major focus of the rabbis' work was the study of the Torah. It was regarded by them as the dearest part of this life and their means to the assurance of life in the world to come (*m. 'Abot 2:7–8*). What they sought by their study of the Scriptures, Jesus said, could only be found in him, the one who gives eternal life (e.g., [John 3:16](#); [17:2](#)). But they would not accept his witness ([5:40](#)) or his claims based on Scripture ([5:39](#)).

It is difficult to be sure exactly what Scriptures were in mind here that bore witness to Jesus.⁴⁷ The early Christians, however, were concerned to base their preaching of Jesus on the fulfillment of

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913], 2. viii–ix, and esp. p. 163).

⁴⁷ See the discussion in W. Magass, "11 Thesen zum Bibellesen und zum 'Suchen' in der Schrift (Joh 5, 39)," *LB* 47 (1980): 5–20.

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Scripture.⁴⁸ One element of the *kerygma* (the early preaching), as C. H. Dodd stressed, was the fulfillment of Scripture (e.g., [Acts 10:43](#)).⁴⁹ Luke provides an example of this type of thinking in the postresurrection story of Jesus teaching two of his followers as he reviewed texts from "Moses and all the Prophets" ([Luke 24:27](#)) that bore witness to him (see the Emmaus story in [Luke 24:27](#)). Matthew offered some insight into the type of texts that might have been in mind in his thirteen fulfillment texts.⁵⁰ Beyond that we

⁴⁸ The Egerton Papyrus II is a second-century collection of texts from John and the Synoptics. Fragment 1 contains quotations from [John 5:39](#), [45](#) as well as [9:29](#). While the texts of these verses contain some slight variations, the importance here is the selections of the texts in this early fragment that rely on Scriptures, especially from Moses, to affirm the coming of Jesus. See H. Bell and T. Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and Other Christian Papyri* (London: British Museum, 1935).

⁴⁹ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1944).

⁵⁰ Eleven texts of Matthew are formula texts concerning Jesus ([1:22](#); [2:15](#), [17](#), [23](#); [4:14](#); [8:17](#); [12:17](#); [13:35](#); [21:4](#); [26:56](#); [27:9](#)). Two are virtu-

are left to speculate, but we do know that the early Christians developed summary lists of particular Old Testament texts that they believed bore witness to Jesus and the fulfillment of time.⁵¹

5:41–47 In this section the defense moves into a counterattack mode in which the accusers are challenged. This counterargument begins with a summary statement that opens the door for the challenge, namely, Jesus' rejection of human praise (*doxa*) as a basis for his claims (5:41). The support for this assertion was his commitment to the Father, which has been stated repeatedly in this chapter. There is no question that Jesus expected praise and glory, but his expectation of glory (*doxa*) was rooted in the fact that he was the "One and Only" (*monogenēs*) Son of the Father (1:14) and in the conviction that the Father would glorify the Son with his preexistent glory (17:5). Jesus came from God (was the

ally formula texts (2:5; 21:42), and two additional texts are related to fulfillment (5:17; 21:16). Also three fulfillment texts are related to John the Baptist (3:3; 11:10; 17:10–12), and two are related to others (13:14; 15:7).

⁵¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Time Is Fulfilled* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 35–53.

agent of God on earth) and would experience the glory of returning to God. But Jesus was not like the self-serving opponents who used their religious positions to gain the praise of other humans. For Jesus human praise at this stage was of little account because he knew the fickle nature of humanity (cf. 2:23–25). Therefore he neither sought nor expected human affirmation for his task as God's agent. His perspective was the affirmation (glory) of the Father (5:44).

Thus, having stated his stance with the Father and with humanity, he turned to review his opponent's situation. It was very different from his. Based on the continuing implications of his knowledge of them (the perfect of *ginōskein*), it was evident that they had not internalized the love of God (5:42). The basis for this assessment was their positive reaction to self-seeking persons claiming a messianic role (5:43).

This period in Jewish history from the Maccabees to Bar Kochbah was filled with messianic speculation and expectation.⁵²

⁵² Concerning messianic speculation see O. Piper, *ISBE*, particularly at 3.332–33, and A. van der Woude and M. de Jonge, *TDNT*, particularly at 9.509–27.

Many pretenders to the title emerged and claimed followers who hoped for glory and position by supporting these persons. The committee sent to investigate John the Baptizer is an example of those who were familiar with the possibilities (1:19–22). The problem was that John claimed to be little except a voice, which to them meant he was a nothing. Therefore their initial opinion concerning him was that he should not be stirring up the people with his baptizing call (1:25).

Jesus was aware of the earnest Jewish longing and search for a Messiah, and he recognized his opponents' personal hopes for gain (5:43). Therefore he summed up their problem in believing him as a problem of their self-centeredness—"accept [i.e., "seek"] praise [*doxa*] from one another" and not from God (5:44; cf. 12:42–43). Accordingly, he understood how the final verdict with God would turn out. They were doomed! 🗡️

Moreover, he told them he would not have to take the stand against them in the ultimate court of destiny. That role had already been accepted by Moses (5:45). W. Meeks sees the reference to Moses here as being in line with the Jewish tradition where Moses served in a continuing role of intercession on behalf of the people of

Israel.⁵³ Whereas the Jews expected Moses to be their supporter and plead with God on their behalf, Jesus announced to them that Moses would serve instead as their accuser (cf. [Deut 31:19](#) and the farewell song of Moses that follows). The reason for the shift in the roles of Moses, Jesus argued, was that not only had they not believed Jesus but they also had not believed the testimony of Moses concerning him (5:46).⁵⁴ Here again it is difficult to be sure what particular texts were in mind, since they have not been cited. Was the reference to [Deut 18:15](#)? Or was it a more general reference to Israel's expectation? Whatever the reference was, Moses' openness to God's leading was not evident in these followers, who claimed to rely on Moses. This theme of reliance is important in John

⁵³ See Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 160–61. The role of Moses as intercessor was spelled out in the episode of the golden calf when Moses prayed to be blotted out if the Lord would not forgive the sins of the people ([Exod 32:32](#)). See also the *As. Mos.* 11:7; 12:6, where Moses is regarded as an intercessor for the people.

⁵⁴ See the discussion on Moses and the Scriptures in S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), particularly pp. 231–66.

and will again be addressed in an expanded form in [John 8](#), where the hostility with the Jews becomes intense.

The present chapter, however, concludes with a final question which leads to the realization that the need for defense is not with Jesus but with the opposition. If Jesus' accusers in fact did not obey/believe (follow the way of) Moses, who was their basic support for tradition, then why should anyone expect them to accept Jesus and his words ([5:47](#))? This question was therefore an open challenge to the opponents. Thus an important option is set forth: who is to be believed? 

The first stage of the Festival Cycle has thus been completed. It was played out at Jerusalem in a pathetic setting of helpless people, undoubtedly for John a symbolic picture of Israel's spiritual condition. When Jesus acted and healed the man, the scene moved inside the temple, but the picture of Israel's spiritual condition, represented by the Jews, remained in a pathetic state. The Son who acted powerfully as God's agent on earth was rejected by tradition-bound opponents who might as well have been categorized as living among the hopeless sick at the Pool of Bethesda. The entire story is set in the

context of a dispute concerning work on a festival day, interpreted by John as a Sabbath controversy because according to [Leviticus 23](#) festivals are related to Sabbath as holy convocations to the Lord, on which one should do no labor. The chapter is thus a moving illustration of Jesus as Lord of the festivals and of the fact that he came to his own people but they did not receive him ([1:11](#)). Readers are thus powerfully warned that institutional religious perspectives can in fact stand in the way of hearing the call of God and can lead to a fundamental rejection of recognizing God's presence and activity in the sphere of humanity. 