

“Equal with God”  
John 5:17-18  
(Preached at Trinity, October 17, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. From the very beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry He faced conflict with the religious leaders.
  - A. In **Chapter 2** Jesus infuriated the Jews when He entered the Temple and drove out the merchants who made great profit during the Passover.  
**John 2:15 NAU** - "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables"  
Their response: "What gives you the right to do this? What is your authority?"  
**John 2:18 NAU** - "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?"
  - B. This was just the beginning of conflict. **Chapter 4** finds Jesus departing from Judea because the Pharisees heard that He was gaining more popularity than John. Jesus traveled through Samaria where He meets the Samaritan woman.
  - C. In **Chapter 5** Jesus enters Jerusalem for the celebration of one of the feasts—either Passover, Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacles. Upon entering the Temple area Jesus came to the Pool of Bethesda and healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.
2. Once again, Jesus falls into conflict with the Jews. **Verse 9** describes the issue precisely: "Now it was the Sabbath on that day."  
The Pharisees were dogmatic about the Sabbath and had added at least 1500 rules that had to be followed. In their eyes Jesus was in serious violation of the Sabbath. This fueled their hatred of Jesus.  
**John 5:16 NAU** - "For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath."
3. In our passage tonight, we see it only got worse. In **Verse 17** Jesus makes a profound statement.
  - A. First, Jesus is calling God His Father. The Jews did not refer to God with the familiarity of "my Father." In all of the Old Testament and extrabiblical Jewish writings, they never referred to God in the first person as "my Father." Yet Jesus referred to God as "My Father." This was offensive to the Jews.
  - B. Second, the Jews clearly understood that Jesus was making Himself equal with the God. "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."  
Jesus was saying that He and the Father were doing the same thing as one. What the Father does He does.  
**John 5:18 NAU** - "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

4. According to the Jewish exposition of Genesis 2:2 Sabbath resting demanded the cessation of all work. Of course, this cannot mean that one day each week God's Providence goes into hibernation. God is always active even on the Sabbath. Jesus is saying that just as God is continuing to work, the Son of God has been active doing one and the same work with the Father from all eternity. As the Father is active doing good work on Sabbath, the Son is also working on the Sabbath.
- A. We should rest on the Sabbath as God rests. God's rest was not inactivity. Too often Christians see the Sabbath as idleness.
- B. A Sabbath's rest is not idle, but active in good works, good for our soul and good for others. That's why works of mercy are permitted.  
**Leon Morris** writes: "Jesus points to the unceasing activity of the Father. Without him this whole created universe would cease. Unless he works continually no one could survive. And because of his close relationship with the Father Jesus works in the same way. The Sabbath cannot interfere with the work of such a one. This has its implications for Christian service. The basic reason given in the Fourth Commandment for keeping the Sabbath is that on that day God rested. God's people must rest as he rests. But Jesus repudiates the thought that the divine rest from Creation took the form of idleness. The compassion of God must be reflected in compassion in God's people."<sup>1</sup>
5. The Jews understood clearly what Jesus meant in **Verse 17**. Jesus was committing the highest form of blasphemy by claiming equality with God. It was a blasphemy punishable by death.  
**John 5:18 NAU** - "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."  
A. They saw it as Jesus making a declaration of independence *from* God. Rather, Jesus was making a declaration of unity *with* God.  
B. Jesus was boldly declaring His deity; His equality with God.  
C. Jesus answered their charge, not by denying it, but by declaring it plainly.  
**John 5:22-23 NAU** - "He has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father."
6. More than any other book in the Bible, the Gospel of John declares the Deity of Christ. Over and over Jesus declares His unity with the Father.  
**John 8:19 NAU** - "So they were saying to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also."  
**John 10:30-31 NAU** - "I and the Father are one." <sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him."  
**John 14:9-11 NAU** - "Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father ' ? <sup>10</sup> "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. <sup>11</sup> "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves."

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 274.

7. That which pertains to the Father also pertains to the Son. "I and My Father are one."  
**John 5:19 NAU** - "for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."

8. Tonight, I want to consider once again the equality of the Father and the Son.

I. First, we need to understand the eternal equality of the Son and the Father

**Second London Confession of 1689** (Chapter 2, article 3)

"In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word (or Son), and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten or proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar, relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him."

A. Each of the persons of the Godhead share the full nature of the one God.

1. This is the most basic theological truth regarding the Trinity—that which is the Divine essence of one person is the Divine essence of all.
2. Each are eternal, and self-existent. Each share all the attributes of the Divine nature.
3. The Trinity maintains the theological distinctives of monotheism, and yet there are three persons. There are three persons but God is not divided. This has always been a stumbling block to the Jews.

B. All that is true of God is true of Jesus

1. Jesus claimed the rights of deity
  - a. He claimed the right to forgive sins  
**Mark 2:10-11 NAU** - "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins "-- He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup> "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."  
**Luke 7:47-49 NAU** - "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?"
  - b. He claimed the right to give life  
**John 5:21 NAU** - "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."
  - c. He claimed the right to judge mankind  
**John 5:22 NAU** - "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,"

3. Being divine, Jesus accepted prayer, praise, and worship  
**Matthew 8:2-3 NAU** - "And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." <sup>3</sup> Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."  
**Matthew 14:33 NAU** - "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"
- C. Jesus possessed all the attributes of the Godhead
1. Eternality  
**John 1:1-2 NAU** - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God."  
**Psalms 93:2 NAU** - "Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting."
  2. Love  
**John 15:9 NAU** - "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love."
  4. Mercy  
**Jude 1:21 NAU** - "keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life."
  5. Omnipotence  
**Colossians 2:10 NAU** - "and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;"
  6. Omnipresence  
**Matthew 18:20 NAU** - "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."
  7. Omniscience  
**John 2:23-25 NAU** - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, <sup>25</sup> and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
  8. Immutable  
**Hebrews 13:8 NAU** - "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever."
  9. As the Father is the source of life Jesus Christ is the source of all life  
**Genesis 2:7 NAU** - "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."  
Jesus says that just as the Father has life in Himself, He too has life in Himself.  
**John 5:26 NAU** - "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself"  
**1 Corinthians 15:45 NAU** - "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit."

II. Second, we need to understand the equality of Jesus in His humanity  
As He walked in His humanity He was God

- A. Jesus never gave up His divine prerogatives
1. Jesus doesn't say in John 10, "I and the Father *were* one but *are* one"
  2. Jesus did not give up any aspect of His deity  
**Hebrews 1:3 NAS** - "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"  
**Colossians 1:15-17 NAU** - "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."
- B. Yet, in taking upon Himself the flesh of humanity He willingly and temporarily gave up His throne – This is what was meant by the Divine Kenosis in Phil. 2
1. The one who was transcendent, high and above our human condition came down to dwell among us.  
**John 1:14 NAU** - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"
  2. In lowliness Jesus left His place of majesty to enter a place of misery
  3. The King became a slave.  
The One eternally in the "form" of God took upon Himself the "form" of a slave. Same word - μορφή  
**Philippians 2:7 NAU** - "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men."
  4. Jesus, the eternal Son, came in absolute submission to the will of the Father  
**Philippians 2:8 NAU** - "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
  5. For all eternity He existed in the exact form of God – He was equal with the Godhead in every way.  
Now in His incarnation He bowed in servitude to the Father  
**John 4:34 NAU** - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."  
**John 5:30 NAU** - "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."
  6. But His deity was in no way diminished

**Conclusion:**

1. Jesus is describing the great mystery. He was absolutely equal with the Father, and yet he came in obedience to the Father.
2. The Divine has taken upon Himself human flesh—two natures in one person. The incarnation of Christ was an infinite condescension, an infinite humiliation, forever an unfathomable mystery.

Charles Wesley wrote:

*Christ, by highest Heav'n adored;  
Christ the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time, behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail th'incarnate Deity,  
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,  
Jesus our Emmanuel.*

3. Jesus Christ has been exalted. In other words, He has returned to the throne that was His for all eternity. He sits as Mediator until all is fulfilled. Then all will be delivered over to the Father so that God will be all in all.
4. Are you at peace with the eternal Savior? Have you received Him and have you bowed before Him as your Lord? Do you worship Him as God?