

Division
John 10:19-42
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19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" 33 The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." 34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? 35 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—36 do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? 37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; 38 but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." 39 Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

40 He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. 41 And many came to him. And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." 42 And many believed in him there. – John 10:19-42, ESV

Some things just divide people, in ways that go beyond reason or evidence or calm rationality. Some people prefer the Designated Hitter in baseball, while others think it keeps the game more honest when pitchers have to take their turn at the plate like everyone else. Some people think instant replay is crucial to ensuring that refs make the right call, while others dislike how it slows down the natural flow of the game. Among American muscle car fans, some people prefer the Mustang, while others like the Camaro better, while still others want the raw power of a Dodge Challenger HEMI. Doctor Who fans argue over who is the best doctor and whether the significant departures made with the 12th doctor are good or bad. Some Lord of the Rings fans love the movies, while other hate them. And don't even get me started on politics!

It seems to be bred into human nature to split ourselves up into camps and argue about stuff. Religious people seem to be especially adept at it, and sometimes our arguments get even more passionate when we're convinced that God is on our side of the debate.

As prone to argument as we human can be, it's helpful to step back and get some perspective. Some issues really are so crucial as to be legitimate dividing lines. The most centrally important point of division – the one that really matters most in the end – is where we stand with Jesus. Do we accept His words and His claims, trusting Him as our Savior and worshipping Him as our Lord, or are we reluctant or refusing to embrace Him?

Today we see another place in the Gospel of John where deep division arose over Jesus' words and claims. The division was at times relatively mild, resulting in heated debate and questioning, while at other times it rose to a more intense hostility, complete with opponents of Jesus picking up rocks to stone Him to death. Looking closely at what caused these divisions and how Jesus responded to them can help us understand our own hearts and the divisions over Jesus that persist in our world to this day.

I. Division Over the Words of Jesus (v. 19-21)

¹⁹ There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.²⁰ Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” ²¹ Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

The first division that arises in John 10 comes in verses 19-21 when “*there was again a division among the Jews because of His words.*” Jesus’ powerful Good Shepherd teaching did not sit well with some people. Who did this man think He was? How could He refer to Himself as “the good shepherd” over God’s sheep? How could He consistently refer to God as “My Father”? And what were these strange words about laying down His life only to take it up again? What kind of person speaks this way?

Some of those who listened to Jesus seemed pretty convinced that such words could not be said by someone who had it all put together upstairs. They judged this itinerant rabbi as being a few fish and loaves shy of a picnic. “*He has a demon and is insane; why listen to Him?*” Others were not so convinced. Jesus’ words were certainly unusual and unprecedented, but they still didn’t sound anything like the words of a deranged, demon-possessed lunatic. Besides, they could not deny the reality of what Jesus had done. It seemed impossible that a demon could or would ever open the eyes of a blind man, especially a man who had been born blind.

Notice how even in this early division and debate, the words of Jesus are inseparably linked to His works. If you just took Jesus’ words by themselves, and you had no miraculous works being done by Him, it does become easier to dismiss Him as an egomaniac or a lunatic or something like that. We can see this same linkage in a pattern of skepticism that emerged within the church in the 1800’s and continued to unfold in the 1900’s.

In the 1800’s, many Bible scholars from mainline Protestant churches in Europe, especially in Germany, accepted the scientific skepticism that dismissed Jesus’ miraculous works as impossible, as fabulous fabrications of the early church, suited for the gullible, pre-scientific ancient world but wholly out-of-step with an enlightened scientific society. These ideas made their way into many mainline American Protestant churches and seminaries in the early 1900’s, including Princeton Theological Seminary and the United Presbyterian Church. Soon, seminaries and pastors were denying that Jesus performed any miracles, including rising from the dead, and denied that He was born of a virgin.

Once the supernatural works of Jesus were jettisoned from respectable academic church circles, what was next? Of course, they began systematically attacking His words. After all, if Jesus didn’t do the miraculous things the Gospels record of Him, how could He have made the bold statements the Gospels record? These efforts culminated in the establishment of The Jesus Seminar in 1985, a group of 50 Bible scholars from leading academic institutions. Among other things The Jesus Seminar did, they judged the recorded sayings of Jesus from the Gospels and concluded that most of them were false, fabricated by the early church.

In the end, these scholars who profess to be Christians who love Jesus want to re-create Jesus into a non-miraculous, dead first century Jewish rabbi who taught love, peace and forgiveness and was so badly misunderstood by His closest followers that they transformed Him into a divine figure after His death and began worshipping Him.

The world has always been divided over the question of who Jesus was and is, what He said and did, and what difference His person and work makes to our lives and our world today. Sadly, sometimes that division has been more violent.

II. Hostility Against the Claims of Jesus (v. 31-33)

The reaction of many to Jesus' good shepherd teaching was dismissal and derision. But the reaction to His bold, clear and shocking statement, "I and the Father are one" was not so mild. John says, "*The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.*"

This is now the third time we're told in John's Gospel of the Jewish leadership's murderous intent against Jesus. Each one follows a strong claim to divinity spoken by Jesus. The first came after Jesus heals the paralytic in John 5. In John 5:17-18, we read – "*But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working. This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.'*"

The second time comes in John 8:58-59: "*Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'*" So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

So, we can see an escalation in the rising conflict here, all centered around Jesus' claims:

1. Jesus says, "*My Father has been working until now, and I am working.*" This leads the Jewish leaders to seek to kill Him.
2. Jesus says, "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" This leads them to actually pick up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus leaves before they're able to take action.
3. Now, Jesus says, "*I and the Father are one*" and they pick up stones again to throw at Him. This time, Jesus doesn't slip away, but He stays and engages them in discussion over what He has said.

Two things are abundantly clear: Jesus is claiming to be divine, and this is deeply offensive to these Jewish leaders. If Jesus' words and teachings in general are regarded as the babblings of a demon-possessed madman, His claims about who He is in relation to God are worse: They are considered blasphemy and call for the death penalty.

III. The Scripture Cannot Be Broken (v. 34-35)

Jesus intervenes in the activity of this murderous mob by challenging them to clarify their charges against Him. He asks them, "*I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?*" He reminds them that He has not only done many works, but they have been good works and tells them that they have been works from the Father. So, which works are so offensive to them.

Of course, Jesus knew that it was not His works but His words which offended them, but He said this to stop them, make them think, and make them articulate their charges. So, they respond, "*It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.*" It's fascinating how exactly backwards their thinking is: It's not that Jesus is a man who is making Himself God, but He is the eternal Son of God who became man.

To answer their charges of blasphemy, Jesus turns the tables on them quickly, quoting Scripture from Psalm 82: ³⁴ *Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?*

At first, this might not seem like the most convincing argument in the world, and it's actually not intended to be. The purpose of this argument is to de-fuse the situation and to provide the beginning of a response to the charges of

blasphemy.

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 82:6. Psalm 82:6-8 says:

*I said, "You are gods,
sons of the Most High, all of you;
7 nevertheless, like men you shall die,
and fall like any prince."
8 Arise, O God, judge the earth;
for you shall inherit all the nations!*

God is here judging His people for their refusal to heed His word. Jesus' point is this: Even in the context of judging His people for their disregard of His word, God reminds them of who they are: They are gods, sons of the Most High. In other words, they are made in the image of God and are His offspring. Thus, they are mighty and special, even though they are guilty and will die in judgment.

If God can use language like this about His sinful, rebellious people, how much more is it appropriate for Jesus to call Himself the Son of God, since He was sent by God into the world, not as the One who receives God's Word, but as the One who is the sent-forth Word of God.

This "how much more" kind of argument from the lesser to the greater was a common form of argumentation in the ancient world. Jesus' hearers would have understood His point very well: If they were going to stone Him for blasphemy, what would they say about the language of God's very word – the Scriptures which cannot be broken, which is also their national law?

Thus, a violent attack on Jesus for His words would also be an attack on the Scriptures. This would be unacceptable. This makes them stop and think and prepares them for the next thing Jesus says, which is the real argument He wants to advance.

IV. The Works Cannot Be Denied (v. 36-38)

Not only can Scripture not be broken, but Jesus' works cannot be denied: "³⁷ *If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*"

The logic of Jesus' argument here is pretty irrefutable: He has done such great and good works that they must be the works of God. They are of such greatness and goodness that they cannot be rightly attributed to anyone other than God. So Jesus says, in essence, "*Don't take my word for it. Look at the evidence of my works.*"

This open display of verifiable and irrefutable miracles is what separates Jesus from every other religious leader:

- I. Joseph Smith says he found Golden Tablets of the Book of Mormon and translated them using divine assistance. No one outside of his family ever saw these golden tablets and Joseph Smith never did any miraculous things for people to see, so we're essentially just supposed to take his word for it.

2. Muhammed claims that God led him to write down the Koran in a cave. Only his brother witnessed any of this, and Muhammed never did any kind of miracles. So, again, we're just supposed to take his word for it.
3. Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as The Buddha ("The Enlightened One"), says that he was given a great insight into the nature of reality and the source of human suffering. Again, he did no verifiable miracles, so we're just supposed to accept his word.

When God speaks, He gives confirmation: In the Old Testament, when Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God, the people could see the pillar of smoke and fire and could witness the trembling of the mountain. When Jesus spoke as the Word of God, He healed a man who had been publicly living as a paralytic beggar for 38 years. He fed 5,000+ people with one boy's small lunch. He healed a man who was known by all to have been born blind. These are not secret miracles and they are not the kind of miracles that can be faked for a show, like Benny Hinn or some huckster faith healer.

Jesus did works than cannot be denied without violating all standards for evidence and reason. To deny Jesus, you must first deny His works. Thus, Jesus' defense of Himself was irrefutable, which is why the attacks on Jesus from modern skeptics start by trying to deny His miracles. To do so, the critics must essentially call the Gospel writers liars, although they usually try to use nicer words. But there's no escaping the logic of the situation: We have only three options:

1. The Gospel writers were liars and fabricated Jesus' miracles. Since they were martyred for their testimony, this means they not only lied but willingly died in defense of a lie.
2. Jesus was a con artist who fooled them into thinking He had done miracles when, in fact, He had not. This means He also would have had to fake His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, since the resurrection is the central miracle of the Apostles' testimony.
3. Jesus did the miracles recorded in the Gospels, including the resurrection, and thus He is the Son of God and only Savior for sinners.

V. Christ's Kingdom Cannot Be Arrested (v. 39-42)

Of course, just because the logic is irrefutable, this doesn't mean that people must believe. The sinful condition of the human heart includes a stubborn refusal to submit to who God is and what He has revealed about His Son. The Jewish leaders respond to Jesus' air-tight argument by seeking to arrest Him. So we read, "*Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.*"

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." ⁴² And many believed in him there."

The only thing more persistent than the stubbornness of the sinful human heart is the sovereign grace of Jesus and the advance of His kingdom. They seek to arrest Him again, just as they had done in John 8, but the time had not yet come. It was not yet Passover, so it was not yet time for the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed. Thus, Jesus escaped from their hands.

Yet the retreat of Jesus from the Jerusalem area was not a defeat at the hands of His opponents. His kingdom went on the advance, in a different direction. Jesus goes across the Jordan, to the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing in the beginning of John's Gospel, and He stayed there. By the way, the place where Jesus goes is probably Bethany beyond the Jordan, and when He returns in John 11 to raise Lazarus, it is at Bethany, the Bethany that is near Jerusalem.

While He was there, across the Jordan, people came to Him. Many of the people who had seen Him do many good works, those who knew that His words were not the words of a demon-possessed man, those who knew His works could not be the works of a demon, these people went across the Jordan and came to Jesus at Bethany beyond the Jordan. Coming to Him, they believed in Him there and found salvation.

These closing verses, far from being some irrelevant post-script to the chapter or just a transition to chapter 11, are the demonstration of the truth of Jesus' teaching about Himself as the good shepherd. He is the good shepherd. He calls His own out and His own follow Him and He gives them eternal life. This is precisely what happens in this chapter: Jesus comes into the vicinity of Jerusalem. He speaks the truth about Himself, then He withdraws. His sheep know His voice to be the voice of their good shepherd and they follow Him, finding faith and salvation in Him.

So again, I ask what we've been asking throughout the chapter: What about you? Are you stubbornly denying the reality of the works and words of Jesus? Are you foolishly remaining in your rebellion and your sin? Or do you hear the voice of your good shepherd and are you coming to Him for eternal life? This is the only division that really matters forever: Will you deny Jesus or follow Him and receive eternal life?