

BLASPHEMY!

John 10:30-42

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“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?’” (Jn. 10:36).

John chapter 10 concludes with a dramatic scene. A man stands in the temple courts, surrounded by an angry mob. Each hand is poised with a stone ready to be thrown. It is a scene out of the Old Testament, which ordered stoning as the penalty for certain heinous crimes. It is not surprising that this crowd was led by religious leaders. But what is surprising is the identity of the man who is about to be put to death. We would expect a trouble-maker to be in such a situation, but this man is famous for his wonderful good works.

We might imagine a person in this situation panicking, cowering back, or trying to run away. But this man does none of these things. Apparently unfazed by the threat, he speaks calm words of challenge and rebuke: “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” he asks.

Thus concludes John’s long account of Jesus’ conflict with the Jewish leaders. He had performed marvelous works of mercy and love in their midst, but they hated him for the truth he revealed. This has continued throughout history. Whether it is the Roman emperor Nero’s sadistic torture of the early Christians, the ruthless persecution of Christians by the Communist regimes of the twentieth century, or today’s postmodern intolerance for the Christian witness, Jesus stands and asks, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” (Jn. 10:32).

THE UNIQUE GOD AND MAN

The accusers had an answer to Jesus' question. They did not object to his good works, they said, although the record shows that they often did. But here it was Jesus' words that enraged them: "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'" (Jn. 10:33).

This refers to Jesus' statement in verse 30: "I and the Father are one." This is as plain and direct a claim to deity as Jesus could have made. His hearers were outraged. It was obvious that Jesus was a man, yet he made himself out to be God. It was blasphemy, pure and simple.

What did Jesus mean by saying, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30)? First, Jesus declared a unity of *will* between himself and God the Father. In the preceding verses, Jesus had declared the security of those who believe on him: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28). Then, to further seal this security, he added, "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" (Jn. 10:29). It is with this in mind that he then said, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). Jesus' will is united with the will of the Father to secure his sheep.

There is a second way we should take Jesus' statement of unity with the Father. They are not only united in will, but also united in *works*. Jesus does the work of God. He was "consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36) to do "the works of my Father" (Jn. 10:37). In John 5:36, Jesus spoke of "the works that the Father has given me to accomplish," and in John 14:10 he said, "The Father who dwells in me does his works." So Jesus is one with God in his will and in his works. Therefore, whenever we see Jesus doing something we can be sure that God the Father is acting in and through him. This was especially true of his primary work of dying on the cross for our sins.

Many commentators stop at this point, seeing in this passage only a unity of will and work between Jesus and God. But it is clear from what follows that there is more. Jesus also asserts a unity of *essence* with the Father. "I and the Father are one," he insists (Jn. 10:30). He elaborates, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn. 10:38). Jesus is not referring merely to the way God indwells a believer's life through the Holy Spirit. Rather, he means that he and the Father are

one divine being. James Boice says, “In theological terms, this is the same as saying that the Son is one in substance with the Father and that they are equal in power and glory.”¹

This enters us into the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity, which states that there is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By “one God” we mean that there are not three different Gods, but one God. Yet there are three divine Persons who share this one divine being. In this respect, it is notable that Jesus did not use the masculine gender when he said that he and the Father are “one”. Had he done so, that would have indicated that he and the Father are one person. This is obviously not true, since Jesus prays to the Father and does his will. They are distinct persons. Instead, Jesus used the neuter gender for “one,” referring not to his person but to his substance. Jesus and the Father are one being.

This is clearly how Jesus’ hearers understood him. Had Jesus meant only that his will is aligned with God’s or that his work was the work of God, the Jews may have disagreed but they would have not tried to stone him for blasphemy. Their understanding is clearly stated: “You, being a man, make yourself God” (Jn. 10:33). Jesus did not correct this impression, when doing so would have removed the threat to his life. Those who say that Jesus never claimed personal divinity have to reckon with this encounter, in which Jesus defends himself from the charge of blasphemy not by denying his deity but by asserting it.

THE KING IN HIS GLORY

There are at least four important implications of Jesus’ claim to be one with God. The first is that we have the knowledge of God in him, since Jesus is God. He later would say, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). Alexander Maclaren explains:

His revelation is no mere revelation by words. Plenty of men have talked about God, and said noble and true and blessed things about Him... It is one thing to speak about God in words, maxims, precepts; it is another thing to show us God in act and life. The one is theology, the other is

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 3:790.

Gospel. The one is the work of man, the other is the exclusive prerogative of God manifested in the flesh.²

This being the case, if we want to know God we can see him revealed in the person and work of Jesus as recorded in the Bible.

Secondly, since Jesus is God believers can be sure that our sins are forgiven through his death on the cross. Some people object to the Christian doctrine of the atonement by arguing that no man can die for another man's sins. This is true, except that Jesus was not a mere man, but the eternal Son of God, who's shed blood is of infinite value in paying the penalty for our sins.

Thirdly, if Jesus is God, then we can completely rely on his promises. If he is one with the Father, then he is certain to fulfill all he has pledged to do. Indeed, only God could seriously make the kinds of promises Jesus does: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28).

Realizing these things will change the way we approach life and, especially, death. D. L. Moody tells of a young woman many years ago who was being overcome by an infection. Those were days when medical care was poor, so her condition was rapidly deteriorating. She had gone blind and seemed to be in a coma. The doctor stood beside her and lamented to her parents, "Poor thing, I'm afraid she has seen her best days." But the girl was not asleep. At these words, she spoke: "You are wrong, doctor. My best days are not behind me but before me. I will see the King in his glory!" How could this young Christian, her days cut short in the flower of life, speak with such confidence? Because she knew God in the face of Christ, because she knew that the blood of Christ had won complete forgiveness of all her sins, and because knowing Jesus to be God she could wholly rely on his promise of eternal life.

A fourth implication of Jesus' teaching deserves special attention. Jesus' claim to be one with God establishes his authority. His words have authority as the very Word of God. His teaching has authority to govern our lives. Jesus has the right to demand our faith and obedience, and his sovereign will cannot be thwarted. This is why the

² Alexander Maclaren: *Sermons for all Seasons*, 250-251.

Jews did not stone him, just as they had not been able to arrest him before and could not take him at the end of this encounter. “I and the Father are one,” Jesus says. This means that he rightly commands our obedience and we refuse him at the peril of our souls.

BLASPHEMY?

It was because of this claim to deity that the unbelieving Jews had gathered up stones to cast at Jesus. Jesus challenged their verdict, asking, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” (Jn. 10:32).

This establishes a sound principle. We should not judge a person’s claims until we see what he or she can do. Someone may claim to be a great artist, athlete, or leader. We should not reject the claim until we examine his achievements. Jesus had made a great claim. Was there evidence? Were his words backed up by works? John’s Gospel has already answered this abundantly. Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, cured lepers, fed the hungry and gave sight to the blind. In the next chapter we will even see Jesus raising the dead to life.

When Jesus speaks of his “good works” we might take this to be the whole pattern of his life. His life was defined by doing good. But he probably refers specifically to his miracles. What do the miracles say about Jesus? Do Jesus’ mighty works lead us to conclude that he was blaspheming when he identified himself with God? Or do they rather lead us to the opposite conclusion: that the one who performed such divine works must be from God and must act in the power of God? What Jesus had done was simply beyond the power of men. Should they therefore stone him or carefully consider his claim to divinity?

This makes an important point regarding unbelief. There is never enough evidence for one who is determined to withhold his faith. Jesus was not threatening the well-being of people, but only the self-centered agenda of the unbelievers. He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38) and led a life of love. He performed wonderful miracles that no mere man could conceivably do. But they still did not accept him because they were determined not to surrender their wills. J. C.

Ryle quotes an older author who put it well: “Unconverted men would kill God Himself if they could only get at Him.”³

Jesus’ opponents could not refute his good works. But, they insisted, they were stoning him not because of what he did but because of what he said: “You, being a man, make yourself God” (Jn. 10:33). Here we have an instance of the apostle John’s irony, because his believing readers know that exactly the opposite is really true: Jesus, being God, had made himself man.

Jesus refuted the charge of blasphemy in a way that is hard for us to follow today. He knew that his accusers wanted a legal pretext for murdering him and, following the standard rabbinic approach to debating, Jesus took this pretext away. “Is it not written in your Law,” he asked, “I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be broken – 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?’” (Jn. 10:34-36).

The Jews were basing their accusation on the Scriptures, so Jesus exposed their inability to handle the Scriptures rightly. He quotes Psalm 82:6, a psalm of rebuke to the unjust judges of Israel. The full verse reads: “I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.” There are some people, like the Mormons, who use Jesus’ citation of this verse to argue that all believers will ultimately become gods. But this is a preposterous interpretation. Rather, the psalm acknowledges that the judges of ancient Israel ruled with God’s authority. They were as gods among the people, fulfilling a holy task on God’s behalf. The point of the psalm is not to exalt these human rulers, but to threaten them for their unjust ways. “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you, nevertheless like men you shall die, and fall like any prince” (Ps. 82:6-7).

What did Jesus accomplish by citing this verse? His point was not to prove his own deity – he used his works for that – but rather to show that his accusers lacked a biblical basis for their charge of blasphemy. The Bible itself uses the word “god” for certain mortal men, although only in a highly qualified sense. Therefore it was not obviously

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 2:242.

blasphemous for Jesus to do the same with reference to himself. In fact, if sinful judges of the past could be called “gods,” how much more ought Jesus, “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (Jn. 10:36), be considered worthy of such a title? Moreover, I think it likely that Jesus had a double purpose in citing Psalm 82. The psalm condemns unjust rulers who set themselves up as gods, which is precisely what Jesus’ opponents had done.

In passing, we should note the high claim that Jesus makes about the Scriptures. He refers to the Old Testament as “the word of God” and asserts that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35) – that is, it cannot be refuted or set aside. He bases his whole defense on one word in a single psalm. This affirms the authority of every single word in the Bible as inspired from God himself.

Notice, too, the severity with which Jesus treats these false accusers. While Jesus treated simple, errant sinners with mercy and kindness, he was severe in condemning false teachers. James 3:1 says that those “who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Following his example, we should be gentle with those who are led astray, but must sharply confront the false teachers who are leading them astray.

Jesus concludes by urging that if they really understood the Scriptures, his accusers would believe in him: “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; 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” (Jn. 10:38).

In other words, since Jesus performed works that could only be ascribed to God, they should think seriously about his claims. I ask you to consider this, if you are not a believer in Jesus. Who else could turn water into wine, raise the sick and lame by his mere word, feed a vast multitude with just a few fish and loaves of bread, and give sight to a man born blind? These are miracles recorded by the Gospel of John. Let the facts impel you to belief. The Gospels proclaim Jesus as the true Son of God and the world’s only Savior. Should you not give some thought to this? Does this not warrant your open-minded study of this Gospel? Jesus says that by this kind of honest investigation, you will gain understanding. Indeed, by the

power of his Word, Jesus offers to open blind eyes to see him as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Jesus' works were not yet finished. In the next chapter he performs his greatest miracle, the raising of Lazarus from the dead – an event attested to by numerous eye-witnesses. Think about what kind of person could do this? But Jesus' greatest work was performed on the cross, where he died to pay the penalty of all the sins of those who believe in him. Matthew's Gospel records that when Jesus died, the earth shook, the rocks were split, and a great darkness fell on the earth. A centurion standing by thought about these things and was led to say, "Surely this was the Son of God!" (Mt. 27:54).

THREE CALLINGS FOR THE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

This passage contains important applications for believers. The first is a calling to truth. The problem with the Pharisees and other religious leaders was that they really did not know their Bibles. They talked about the Bible and they made a show of their supposed loyalty to Scripture. But they really did not know what the Bible taught. They had been using it to support their own pre-conceived notions. Therefore, despite the fact that the great message of the Bible is the coming of God's Son as Savior and Lord, they justified their unbelief by appealing to the Scriptures.

I emphasize this because so many professing Christians do not know their Bibles. They own Bibles and carry them, but they do not earnestly study the Bible. They do not know the biblical reasons for what they believe, and many of them therefore believe things that are false. The fact is that many church attenders today will not tolerate sound Bible teaching. Some value the Bible only for the practical help they seek, without real interest in the truths of God, man, and salvation. The Bible is not made relevant by its usefulness to our worldly lifestyles; rather, the Bible is relevant in and of itself, being the very Word of God. Unless Christians are people of truth, we will not stand against the current of the world, and our errors will contribute to the loss of many souls, including some of our own.

A second application is that Christians are called to a life of holiness and love. We see this in the relationship between Jesus' words and

his works. It is fair for people to judge the truth we profess by the life that we lead. Jesus challenged his accusers to do this; could you? Does your life show evidence of the spirit of Christ in you? If our answer as Christians is No – if there is little of Jesus to be seen in us – then our words are not likely to have much effect on the world.

Lastly, Christians are called to give a verbal witness to Christ and his gospel. We are to know the truth, live the truth, and then tell the truth. We see the last of these in the final verses of this chapter: “He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. Any many came to him. And they said, ‘John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.’ And many believed in him there” (Jn. 10:40-42).

This is encouraging, because what came before it was so disheartening. We wonder, “Will anyone believe the gospel? If Jesus showed himself at the temple with such powerful works and words and still was rejected, what hope is there for the gospel in such a world?” Jesus was rejected at the temple because the people there were proud and hard-hearted. So he went out into the country, back to the place where John the Baptist had preached, “and many believed in him there.” This should greatly encourage our witness.

John the Baptist was not able to do miracles. All he could do was lead a holy life and tell people about Jesus. This is what we are called to do. It is not necessary for pastors or Christian workers to perform wonders; we do not have to walk on water or turn water into wine. We just tell people about Jesus, and, as John did, warn them of God’s judgment on their sin. It is significant that this was a place where people had been brought under conviction of sin, so Jesus went there with his gospel. All John did was show people their need and direct them to Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Having heard about Jesus, the people went to see him for themselves. And when they met him, they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man is true” (Jn. 10:41).

This is why we must tell the world about Jesus and commend our witness with our lives: so people will seek him and experience him for themselves. And when their hearts have been prepared by the awareness of their own need for the forgiveness he offers, many will believe. John had come and gone, but knowing the truth, living the

truth, and telling the truth, his life was still making a difference. The same will be true today if people can say of us, “I remember what they said about Jesus, and when I met him I found that all of it was true.”