

# Lesson Six

*(John 5:19-47)*

Bristling with hatred, the Jewish authorities accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath law and of claiming to be equal with God (5:1-18). So Jesus now tries to elaborate upon the relationship between the Father and the Son.

## **The Authority of the Son**

*(John 5:19-29)*

<sup>19</sup>So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the truth: the Son can do nothing on his own; he does only what he sees his Father doing. What the Father does, the Son also does. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. He will show him even greater things to do than this, and you will all be amazed. <sup>21</sup>Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, in the same way the Son gives life to those he wants to. <sup>22</sup>Nor does the Father himself judge anyone. He has given his Son the full right to judge, <sup>23</sup>so that all will honor the Son in the same way as they honor the

Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

<sup>24</sup>"I am telling you the truth; whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He will not be judged, but has already passed from death to life. <sup>25</sup>I am telling you the truth: the time is coming — the time has already come — when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will come to life. <sup>26</sup>Just as the Father is himself the source of life, in the same way he has made his Son to be the source of life. <sup>27</sup>And he has given the Son the right to judge, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not be surprised at this; the time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out of their graves; those who have done good will rise and live, and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned.

Jesus points out that the Father and the Son always operate in harmony, with complete unity of purpose (5:19). Since the Father is always "on call," even on the Sabbath, it is proper for the Son to be active as well. And he says that because the Father loves the Son even greater events than the healing of a sick man will take place (5:20). This refers to the fact that in a little while God will raise many of his people (Matt. 27:52-53) and then Jesus himself from the grave.

Concerning 5:22, Frank Pack says: "God's divine judgment is exercised through the Son. The Father does not act apart from the Son in judging, and the Son makes the judgment that the Father wishes to have made. In effect, God judges all men through his Son. The New Testament teaches that God is judge of all men (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 3:6; 14:10; Heb. 12:23), but it also teaches that God judges through Christ (Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:8)" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 89).

Contrary to the opinion of some religious leaders today, Jesus was not just a courageous man and an outstanding teacher. He was the Son of God! And any refusal to love, honor, and worship him as such is a direct insult to God the Father (5:23). That is why the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are going to be in a "heap o' trouble" at the judgment day, for they deny that Jesus was equal with God.

But the person who lovingly obeys Jesus has already begun to enjoy eternal life (5:24), although he must remain in his human body until either he dies or the Lord returns. And so long as he continues to live for Jesus he has the solid assurance that "there is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

In 5:25 Jesus uses the Greek noun *nekros*, a word which sometimes refers to an absence of life in the human body (James 2:26) but may also mean, as here, the deplorable spiritual state of unsaved people. Paul used the same idea when he wrote, "But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4-5).

In 5:27 the TEV uses the phrase "the right" to translate the Greek word *exousia*, which refers to the delegation of authority or power. This idea is also conveyed by Jesus when, after his resurrection, he says: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). And because he endured the hardships and temptations of human existence, Jesus is uniquely qualified to judge us. We know that the time is coming when "all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

In 5:28-29 Jesus turns his attention to the subject of the physically dead and of the universal resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved. Paul often warns Christians of the possibility of apostacy (or falling from grace) and urges us to be ready when the Lord comes again (1 Thess. 4:25-28; 5:9-11). Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and have been true to him will be pronounced, "Not guilty!" While those who have rejected Jesus' offer of salvation will be judged, "Guilty!" and will be sentenced to an everlasting hell.

The word "evil" is from the Greek word *phaula*, meaning useless or unproductive. A person can get to hell without actually killing, robbing, and lying. He can get there just by doing nothing good at all. On the judgment day everyone will be there (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10) as each person is individually judged (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10) according to his own works (Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12-13).

### Witnesses to Jesus

(John 5:30-47)

<sup>30</sup>"I can do nothing on my own authority; I judge only as God tells me, so my judgment is right, because I am not trying to do what I want, but only what he who sent me wants.

<sup>31</sup>"If I testify on my own behalf, what I say is not to be accepted as real proof. <sup>32</sup>But there is someone else who testifies on my

behalf, and I know that what he says about me is true. <sup>33</sup>John is the one to whom you sent your messengers, and he spoke on behalf of the truth. <sup>34</sup>It is not that I must have a man's witness; I say this only in order that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup>John was like a lamp, burning and shining, and you were willing for a while to enjoy his light. <sup>36</sup>But I have a witness on my behalf which is even greater than the witness that John gave; what I do, that is, the deeds my Father gave me to do, these speak on my behalf and show that the Father has sent me. <sup>37</sup>And the Father, who sent me, also testifies on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his face, <sup>38</sup>and you do not keep his message in your hearts, for you do not believe in the one whom he sent. <sup>39</sup>You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! <sup>40</sup>Yet you are not willing to come to me in order to have life.

<sup>41</sup>"I am not looking for human praise. <sup>42</sup>But I know what kind of people you are, and I know that you have no love for God in your hearts. <sup>43</sup>I have come with my Father's authority, but you have not received me; when, however, someone comes with his own authority, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup>You like to receive praise from one another, but you do not try to win praise from the one who alone is God; how, then, can you believe me? <sup>45</sup>Do not think, however, that I am the one who will accuse you to my Father. Moses, in whom you have put your hope, is the very one who will accuse you. <sup>46</sup>If you had really believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. <sup>47</sup>But since you do not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?"

In 5:31-39 Jesus declares that his rights (5:23-30) are substantiated by four witnesses: John the Baptist; God the Father; Jesus' own works; and the scriptures. This more than meets the requirement of the Law (Deut. 17:6; 19:5; Num. 35:30) that no testimony could be accepted without at least one other witness (5:31).

In 5:35 Jesus pays tribute to the magnificent ministry of John the Baptist. As needles are attracted to a magnet, the multitudes flocked to hear John the Baptist. He did not have as fine an education as the priests had, so his speech was void of theological jargon. But he knew how to "shuck the corn and show the cob." You might not like what he said, but it was hard to misunderstand him. So the common people related to him and his colorful, unique style of preaching. Like a lamp, John the Baptist burned brightly in order to guide the people out of spiritual darkness.

And overflow crowds followed him in the wilderness. Many of them had honest motives, but most were driven by curiosity rather than conviction. So when he began exposing their sin they left to find someone with less honesty and a lot more tact. Many years later, Paul warned Timothy (and everyone who teaches God's word) not to give in to the temptation to be popular rather than truthful:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because he is coming to rule as King, I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience. The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

But even greater than the disturbingly truthful witness of John the Baptist is the witness of the miracles which Jesus had done and would do (5:36). As Nicodemus was forced to admit, "No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him" (3:2).

And then there is the witness of God himself (5:37). Jesus delivers a series of stinging verbal blows to the arrogant Jewish authorities. He begins by saying that they do not really believe in God! One of his listeners might have objected, "That's silly. Why, we believe that God exists. What do you mean calling us atheists?" The point is, of course, that intellectual acceptance is not the kind of faith that will save anyone. They had the message of God wrapped up in their scrolls, but did not have it within their hearts. So Paul says of them, "I can assure you that they are deeply devoted to God; but their devotion is not based on true knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). Unlike the Jews, the Christians in Rome had "obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received" (Rom. 6:17). The problem of the Jews was in the heart, not the head.

Jesus indicates that they were serious, but misdirected, students of God's word (5:39). The TEV uses "study" to translate the Greek word *ereunao*, meaning to trace or to track down, to

thoroughly examine. David Wesley Soper, in his book *Epistle to the Sceptics* (pp. 44-45), says: "It is obvious that the Bible cannot speak to men who do not take it seriously. It is equally obvious that to substitute the Bible for the God to whom it witnesses is to commit idolatry. Not the Bible, but God, sustains and creates the world. The Bible, designed as a channel of revelation, becomes the whole of revelation — and forward movement is ended. The channel becomes an obstacle. One should not worship a telescope, but look through it at the stars. One should not worship a microscope, but look through it at worlds in miniature. The purpose of the Bible is not to imprison but to release faith; it is not an end but a means."

Then Jesus charges them with having "no love for God in your hearts" (5:42). How does Jesus know that? By the fact that they would not receive him (5:43). Love for God always results in obedience to God's commands and love for God's people (1 John 2:5-6; 4:7). "Whoever does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

In 5:43 Jesus refers to the fact that during the first century (both before and after Jesus' ministry) dozens of would-be Deliverers proclaimed themselves as the longed-for Messiah. And thousands of Jews responded like blind sheep, in spite of ample warning (Mark 13:6, 21-22; Acts 5:36-37).

If they had only gone to the Bible in order to seek God's guidance, rather than searching for "proof-texts" with which to prop up their human traditions, they would have heard even the words of Moses pointing them to Jesus (5:45-47). Unfortunately, this fatal approach to the scriptures has spread throughout the ranks of those who claim to be Christians, resulting in sectarian attempts to bind "our" traditions on everyone else.

### **Thought Stimulators on John 5:19-47**

1. What "greater things" (5:20) will be done than the healing of the sick man?
2. Who will judge us and upon what basis?
3. In what ways are Jesus and God "equal"?
4. To whom do we look as our "authority"?
5. How can you tell that a person is spiritually dead?
6. What must a person do in order to be an "evil" person?
7. In what ways are God the Father and God the Son our "source of life" (5:26)?
8. How does Jesus describe John the Baptist?

9. What is the primary duty of anyone who teaches the word of God?
10. What does it mean to have the Bible in your head but not in your heart?
11. Discuss the statement that the Bible "is not an end but a means."
12. What two things always result when a person really loves God?
13. Can you think of examples in which someone has formed an opinion then gone to the Bible to find a statement to somehow back it up?
14. Ask a Christian friend to help you concentrate God's power upon an unsaved person all this week by both of you praying for him each day.