

Further Conflict Over Jesus' Claims

John 10:22-42

Warm-up Question: What kinds of things did you fight about with friends, brothers or sisters as you were growing up?

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one." ³¹ Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" ³³ "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"?' ³⁵ If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?' ³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. 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 in the Father." ³⁹ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. ⁴⁰ Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, ⁴¹ and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true." ⁴² And in that place many believed in Jesus.

Is Jesus the Messiah?

Two months had now gone by since Jesus spoke about the Good Shepherd recorded in verses 1-21 of chapter 10. John records a new confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in the temple courts. The timing of

this confrontation is the Festival of Dedication or Hanukkah, which was not of Biblical origin but originated with Judas Maccabaeus in 164 BC after Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the Temple of Jerusalem. The festival was so named because it commemorated the time of the rededication of the Temple after Antiochus had slaughtered a pig on the Holy Altar of God, and had also set up a statue of Zeus with his own face on it. Hanukkah was also called the Festival of Lights as a reminder that when they went to rededicate the Temple Candlestick, they only had consecrated oil for one day and it took eight days before a fresh supply of oil could be produced and set apart for holy use. Jewish tradition tells us that the oil kept burning for the whole eight days miraculously until the new supply came. Jewish people celebrate this time of the year near the Christmas holiday, which is why you will often see eight candlesticks or eight lights in the homes of Jewish people around December of each year. Most Jewish people will light a new candle for each day of the eight days of Hanukkah.

At 2500 feet above the Mediterranean Sea level, December is a cold time of the year in Jerusalem. In John's description of the setting for this confrontation, he writes that it was winter. Every Jew is very familiar with the fact that Hanukkah is in the wintertime, so the statement seems a bit redundant. It could be that John mentions this for the sake of the Gentiles who would not be familiar with the timing of Hanukkah, or it could be that John wanted to set the scene by telling us that it was cold. It does occasionally snow in Jerusalem in the winter months. (I once had a snowball fight on the Mount of Olives just a few hundred yards from the Temple Mount.) Imagine the setting for this confrontation. I picture the spiritual atmosphere as a dark and cold time and that there was a spiritual chill in the air towards Him. It is likely that this new attack was launched toward Jesus after He had taught the early morning scripture class there under the roof of Solomon's Colonnade. This Colonnade was on the East side of the Temple Mount. It was a series of columns that stood 25 cubits (around 38 feet high) at regular intervals supporting a roof protecting the people from rain or snow. Josephus, the Jewish

historian, tells us that each pillar was of one entire stone each and that stone was white marble. The roofs were adorned with cedar and beautifully carved.¹ Jesus often taught under this beautiful roofed colonnade and this was also the place where the man that was healed at the Beautiful Gate by Peter and John celebrated with leaping and jumping as he praised God (Acts 3:8-11). This was also the site where the early believers met together after the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit upon the new believers (Acts 5:12).

We are told that the Jews gathered around Him, as if to block His way as they confronted Him with the question, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (verse 24).

Why would Jesus avoid answering this question publicly with a simple yes or no?

We should not think that this was a genuine desire to know the truth about the true identity of Jesus. No, this was a desire to finally have some ammunition to incriminate Him. If they could just get Him to say that He was the Christ there in the Temple Courts, there would be plenty of religious Jews to bear witness to His words and stone Him for blasphemy. If only they could get Him to say, “I am God,” it would be over. He had revealed His identity to a few individuals in specific encounters. To Nicodemus He had said that He was the Son of Man that came down from heaven (John 3:13-14). When Jesus chatted to the Samaritan woman at the well in John, chapter four, the lady said to him, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes He will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he” (John 4:25-26). When Jesus was at the Feast of Tabernacles, He stated that He knew God and came from Him and was sent by Him. At that time they had also tried to seize Him (John 7:29-30). And then again in chapter eight of John’s gospel He had said that, “before Abraham was born I am,” using the divine name that God used when He revealed Himself to Moses (John 8:58). In the other gospels also, Jesus declared that to receive Him was to receive God (Matthew 10:40), and to welcome Him was to welcome God (Mark 9:37), and to have seen Him was to have seen God (John 14:9).

A child once drew a picture, and his mother asked him what he was doing. The child said, “I am drawing a

picture of God.” The mother said, “Don’t be silly. You can’t draw a picture of God. No one knows what God looks like.” The child replied, “Well, they will by the time I have finished!” Jesus said in effect, “If you want to know what God looks like, look at me.”

Jesus was careful not to say publically who He was, but by the things that He did and his indirect claims, He made Himself known. Take for instance, the time when He forgave the sins of the paralyzed man:

³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**” ⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**” ⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ ¹⁰ But I want you to know **that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.**” So he said to the man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:3-12).

Notice the wonderful courage of Jesus in this passage of scripture. He knows that the teachers of the law are there, and yet in the full hearing of them all, He forgives the man’s sins and heals him knowing that it will bring on a confrontation from the religious Jews.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, has a few thoughts on the above passage:

“One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he

¹ Josephus, (Jewish War 5.5.2).

forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give his conduct. Yet, this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the person chiefly offended in all offenses. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws were broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any other character in history."²²

Of course, as we work through the Book of John, there are plenty of other evidences that we will come across where Jesus made it clear who He was, and deliberately angered the religious Jews by His statements, but at this point the Lord had not explicitly and publically stated that He was the Messiah. We must remember that the Jewish people were looking for a warrior King Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule, and a humble servant Savior from sin was not on their agenda. The Jewish leaders and Pharisees did not see their need of a Savior from sin. Jesus told them that the reason that they did not believe was that they were not His sheep.²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep (verse 26).

Isn't everybody on planet earth a child of God? What do you make of Jesus' statement that there are some who are not His sheep?

The call has gone out to the whole world to repent and believe the gospel, but there are some who harden their hearts and have chosen to stubbornly reject God's offer of a free pardon for their sin. God knows ahead of time who will respond because He knows all things, even those things that are outside of time and yet future. It is hard for us to comprehend this, but God does not dwell in the confines of time as we do. He is not limited to knowing only what has been before or what is happening in the present. God's sovereignty and election operate even amongst those who do not believe. This does not remove their responsibility for their unbelief, nor does it compromise the invitation to believe, which goes out to all. These men who refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, had made their own choice of whether or not to receive Jesus and acknowledge Him as Savior. The gift of eternal life with God is freely of-

fered to all who will hear and respond to the call:

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life (Revelation 22:17).

There are three stages to this act of believing or placing one's trust in Christ that brings about saving faith. First of all there is listening or hearing His call, secondly, there is intimacy with Him—God knowing them, and thirdly, there is a following after Him. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me (verse 27). Every one of us should look carefully at this verse, and be honest with ourselves—our very eternal lives depend on it—Are you avidly seeking to hear God's Word and respond to it when you hear it? Are you becoming more and more intimately acquainted with God through Christ? And is your life reflecting your belief by walking in the same way that Jesus lived His life, seeking to model your life after Him? Are you choosing to be a follower? If not, do you truly believe His words?

Eternal Security

When we set our hearts to no longer serve ourselves but the Lord Jesus, there is an impartation of His Divine life to us that is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit comes in and we are born from above. The apostle Peter puts it like this:

²² Now that you have **purified yourselves** by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have **been born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:22-23).

When we sincerely and unreservedly place our trust in the Lord Jesus, He gives us the gift of eternal life, ²⁸ "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one." He didn't say, "If they work hard at it, I will give them eternal life." The gospel message is that there is a divine transaction that takes place upon a person believing the good news, repenting of sin, and turning toward and placing one's trust in Christ. Salvation is a

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Published by Simon and Shuster, New York. Page 55.

gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). God does not give and then take it back. It is not dependent on our works or on how well we walk out what we have received. We are given the gift of eternal life from the Lord Jesus, but we are also a gift from the Father to the Lord Jesus, for Christ says, "My Father, who has given them to me..." (verse 29). I cannot see God being unable or lacking in power or ability to stop Satan from snatching me out of Christ's hand once I am in there. Yes, I can walk away and fall into sin, but a child of God that is born-again no longer wants to walk away. He wants to please the one that he is in love with. Don't get me wrong, we may still sin as believers, but we don't have to! We are not bound to sin. The power to overcome sin is resident in us through the Holy Spirit.

As we grow in Christ we will be given strength, grace and power from God to overcome our sin and our self-life. Edmund Hilary, the first climber of Mount Everest got it right when he said, "it's not the mountain we conquer but ourselves." Peter the Great of Russia is quoted as saying, "I have been able to conquer an empire but I have not been able to conquer myself." Hugo Grotius, the Dutch jurist and scholar, said, "A man cannot govern a nation if he cannot govern a city, he cannot govern a city if he cannot govern a family, and he cannot govern himself unless his passions are subject to reason."³ If I fall into habitual sin, God is well able to discipline me and make life so miserable for me that I will want to come back to Him, overcome my sins and gain victory over self. There is no power on earth, according to the Lord Jesus in our passage today, that is able to tear us out of God's hand. He has never torn up the Christian's birth certificate! The reason no Christian can be snatched out of the Father's hand is because it was the Father who placed him there. John Cotton once wrote, "It may be that we are sinful; but God did not love us for our goodness, and neither will he cast us off for our wickedness." We can walk away, but if we are truly born-again and one of His children, God is well able to bring us back and correct our path. God's seed will come to God's harvest! If we continue in sin with no feeling of guilt or moral scruple, then we have to ask ourselves if we have ever been truly born again of God's Spirit. Donald Grey Barnhouse once said, "We do believe in eternal security, but we do not believe in eternal presumption. Let a man examine himself." John the apostle wrote:

¹⁸ We know that **anyone born of God does not continue to sin**; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them (1 John 5:18).

Have you experienced God's disciplinary power to turn you back after you have fallen into sin? What made you turn back to Him? How does God use natural consequences of our actions to teach us spiritual lessons?

Christ's Oneness with the Father

Jesus was never one to shirk from a fight. He is a man's man. The very thing they are looking for He gives them, ³⁰ "I and the Father are one" (verse 30). When Jesus said this they began picking up stones to stone Him with. Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. **For which of them do you stone me?**" "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (John 10:32-33). I would think that they would not find many stones that were laid about in the courts of the Lord. In that holy place I am sure it was cleaned every day and things like stones were not brought in unless they expected to stone someone. Again, we see the courage of Christ to speak the truth to them however the chips might fall. The Jews had come ready for a "showdown".

If I were to ask you what is the chief scripture that summarizes the Christian faith, you would probably answer with John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." If you would ask any Jewish person to choose the most important theological scripture in Judaism, they would quote you Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." That's why the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, because He had said that He and God were one.

Notice that when they accused Him of claiming to be God, Jesus did not correct them. If He were only a prophet, and not God, He would have said so! After all, He claimed to be the truth; "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Someone who claimed to be the embodiment of truth would not allow such a grave misunderstanding to be believed about Him. Later on, when He would finally appear to Thomas, one of the twelve dis-

³ Taken from the devotional, Every Day With Jesus, written by Selwyn Hughes, July Aug 2003, God's Great Guarantee. Published by Crusade for World Revival.

ciples, after His crucifixion in the upper room, He did not correct Thomas when the disciple exclaimed to Jesus; “My Lord and My God!” If Jesus were not indeed God, we would see Him rebuking Thomas for such a blasphemous statement. Instead, the passage indicates that Thomas finally understood who Jesus really was, as Jesus invited Thomas to examine His wounds, stop doubting and believe (John 20:26-29).

When one is talking with a Jewish person about the Messiah, this can be a major stumbling block to them, for they believe that Christians hold to a belief in not one, but three Gods. This is an idea that is preposterous and blasphemous to the mind of a devout Jew. The Hebrew word translated with the English word *one* in Deuteronomy 6:4, is the word *Echad*. This Hebrew word is a compound-unity noun. What that means is that it is a noun that demonstrates unity, and yet being comprised of several parts. We see the word *Echad* used to demonstrate a husband and wife becoming **one** flesh (Genesis 2:4). When the twelve spies were sent into the land of Canaan to spy out the land, they wanted to show the fruitfulness of the land, so they cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes. The word **one cluster** is our Hebrew compound word *echad*. Also, in Ezra 2:64, we are told that “the whole company numbered 42,360,” the word **whole company** is this same word, *echad*. When God wanted to communicate one and only one, he used a different Hebrew word, the word *Yachid*. We find this word used in the testing of Abraham: “Take your son, your **only** son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah” (Genesis 22:2). There was just one son that God recognized as the heir to the promises of Abraham, his **only** (*yachid*) son Isaac, the child of the promise through Sarah, Abraham’s wife. When He wants to communicate the tri-unity of God He used the word *echad*. John the apostle tells us that, “He was with God in the beginning (John 1:2). Do we find God referred to in the plural in Genesis, chapter one? Yes! The Spirit is mentioned as hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2) and then in verse 26: “Then God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness, and let them rule...”(Genesis 1:26). The word God is in plural form also, it is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a plural noun. God Himself lives in a community of Oneness. I have used the example before of a human being. The Bible declares that each of us are made up of three parts to our nature, spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23), each of us are one but have three different parts to our

“oneness.”

Jesus then responds to their attempt at stoning Him by bringing up a passage of scripture from the Book of Psalms. He quotes to them from verse six of Psalm 82.

¹ God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the “gods”: ² “How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? ³ Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. ⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. ⁵ “The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. ⁶ “I said, ‘You are “gods”’; you are all sons of the Most High.’ ⁷ But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler. ⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance (Psalm 82:1-8).

Chuck Swindoll helps us better understand what Christ is saying to the faithless shepherds and judges of Israel that are standing before Him:

“The psalmist reminded Israel’s appointed judges that they were like little gods in that the Supreme Judge had appointed them to rule in His stead; therefore, they were accountable to Him. Jesus identified the worthless judges in the psalm as the religious leaders before Him, and He declared Himself to be the fulfillment of the poem’s opening line: “God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the [‘gods’]” (Psalm 82:1). For these apostate rulers of Israel to judge the Supreme judge was nothing short of blasphemy. It was *they* who should be stoned.”⁴

In the Old Testament, the judges were commissioned by God to deliver God’s judgment to men. They were to judge in place of God, knowing that they themselves would stand before God one day and be judged by Him as to what they did with such power over men. In fact, the Hebrew word *Elohim*, most commonly translated into the English word *God*, is translated as judges in Exodus 21:6. Jesus was saying that if scripture can speak like that about men, how much more could the true Son of God speak so of Himself:

³⁵ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son?’(John 10: 35-36).

⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, Swindoll’s New Testament Insights on John, Published by Zondervan, Page 193.

Jesus again makes it very clear to the Jews that were standing there in Solomon's Colonnade as to His identity that they may "understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:38). It was very plain to them now, if it wasn't plain to them before, that Jesus was saying that He is One with the Father. Do you believe Him? Again they tried to seize Him, but He escaped out of their grasp (verses 38-39).

Do you have a place that you go to when you want to be alone to gather your thoughts or be spiritually recharged?

When Jesus escaped, He retreated to a place that was familiar, to the place where John baptized and where Jesus' ministry started. This place held a special significance for Jesus. There is something to be said about returning to certain places in our lives when we need be alone with our thoughts. William Barclay has said "It would often do our souls a world of good to make a pilgrimage to the place where we first found God. The place to which Jesus went is most significant. He went to the place where John had been accustomed to bap-

tize, the place where He Himself had been baptized. It was there that the voice of God had come to Him and assured Him that he had made the right decision and was on the right way. Even on the far side of the Jordan the Jews came to Jesus, and they too thought of John. They remembered that he had spoken with the words of a prophet; but had done no mighty deeds. They saw that there was a difference between Jesus and John. To John's proclamation Jesus added God's power. John could diagnose the situation; Jesus brought the power to deal with the situation. These Jews had looked on John as a prophet; now they saw that what John had foretold of Jesus was true, and many of them believed."⁵

What about you? Have you heard enough evidence yet as to the true nature of Christ? Have you placed your faith in Him, and found Him to be the Good Shepherd of Israel? He stands waiting with His invitation for you to come to Him and find rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

Prayer: Your love amazes us, Lord. How wonderful for us that the King of Heaven should come down and reveal your love to us in so many ways. We invite you to make Your home in our hearts. Amen.

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⁵ William Barclay, The Daily Bible Study Revised Edition, The Gospel of John, Vol 2, Published by St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, Page 79