

The Polarizing Words of Jesus

We have now come to a critical place in John’s Gospel. There has been a significant shift in the Pharisees’ attitude toward Jesus. Previously they were simply persecuting him because he was breaking the Sabbath. Now they seek to kill him because he is saying things that suggest that he is equal with God. What the Pharisees thought they were hearing was Jesus saying that he is another god equal with God. Jesus takes this much further and claims that he is actually one with God.

John 5:16–29

16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

Jesus Is Equal with God

18 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 Authority of the Son

19 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. **20** For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. **21** For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. **22** The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, **23** that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. **24** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. **26** For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. **27** And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice **29** and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

There are four statements here that build upon each other that help to structure this passage. Each of the phrases in the original Greek begin with the word “for.” D.A. Carson calls them the “Four For’s.” The ESV is helpful here because they are translated correctly and are easy to spot. In these Four For’s, Jesus explains more fully his relationship with the Father and gives us a deep insight into the Trinity.

1. **For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. (v.19)**

While this verse does suggest that there is a subordination of the Son to the Father, this subordination is not in contrast to Jesus’ claim of being one with God. This is subordination of function, not of substance. What we cannot miss is that Jesus is saying that ALL the Father does is also done by the Son. That is why Paul can say in Colossians 1 that Jesus created all things, and that in him all things hold together.

2. **For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. (v.20)**

The verb tense here for “loves” suggests a constant love that has always been and will always be. The revelation of God has come through the Son to us, not primarily because the Father has loved us, but primarily because of the eternal love of the Father for the Son. In the same way, our salvation is not based primarily on the love of the Son for us, but is instead based primarily on the Son’s love for the Father. (Cf: John 14:31)

3. **For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. (v.21)**

This verse frames up verses 21-24. The Pharisees already believed that it was God alone who

could raise people from the dead, but Jesus now claims that he, like the Father, raises people from the dead. He then goes on to speak of being the judge of the world and says that honoring the Father and honoring the Son are the same thing. What Jesus is saying is that he is the dividing line of all humanity. What you do with Jesus determines if you really know the Father.

4. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. (v.26)

This verse frames up verses 25-29, and here the thought switches to the final judgment and resurrection. While the title “Son of God” has been used of Jesus throughout these verses, Jesus now speaks of himself as also being “Son of Man” (v.27), reminding us of his humanity. And as “Son of Man,” Jesus is uniquely qualified to judge the world. And as the Son of God who has life in himself, he holds the power of the resurrection.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Pharisees respond with such anger and violence to Jesus’ statements that he was equal with God? Why was this such an offense to them?
2. How is it possible that Jesus does all that God the Father does? What are some of the implications of this?
3. In reading John 14:31, what is the proof of Jesus’ love for the Father? What does it mean for you that Jesus went to the cross, not primarily because he loved you, but primarily because he loved the Father?
4. What do verses 22-24 tell us about other religions?
5. Why is it so important that Jesus is both the Son of God and a son of man? In what ways does Jesus’ humanity help our relationship with him?

Going Deeper

1. How has the study of these verses deepened your understanding of Christ? How has it deepened your understanding of the Trinity?
2. Having a fuller picture of the person of Christ and of the Triune God, what does your response need to be? What needs to change in your attitude or actions to reflect your fuller understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ?