

SPECIAL STUDIES NUMBER FOUR

John 5:18

John 5:18 reads as follows:

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was the Father, making himself equal with God."

The American Standard Version of this text reads thus:

"For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

The word "therefore", or "for this cause therefore", looks back to the previous statement of Christ in verse 17, namely, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." These words are so unique that upon hearing them John reports that "the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he...said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."

If by the words "My Father" Christ merely intended to convey a relationship to God the Father which every son of God bears, then such would not have been offensive to "the Jews". But, what He said was offensive to them. Therefore, His words convey something more than something true of a relationship to God the Father which every son of God bears. It is certainly true that God has many "sons". John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God..." (I John 3:2). And, Paul states that "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). In John 5, however, Christ is not referred to as "a son", as if one of many, but "the Son", verses 19,20,21,22,23,25,26,27. Uniqueness is intended, and John's words in John 5:18 show exactly that.

Now what is there in John's words that convey such uniqueness? In the answer, we appeal to scholarship for definition only, and then purpose to compare scripture with scripture. The mere reading of John 5:18 would not of itself lead one to conclude, as did the Jews, that the words "that God also was his Father" contained therein meant that He was "making himself equal with God." Anyone might claim that "God was his Father" without leading others to conclude that such was a claim to be "equal with God". But, whatever those words signify, the Jews certainly understood them to be a claim to be "equal with God". Therefore, there is more contained in the expression "that God also was his Father" than meets the eye of the casual reader.

The key is in the pronoun "his" in verse 18. Kenneth Wuest speaks of this word "his" as follows:

"The pronoun 'his' does not bring out the full force of the Greek here...The word...means 'one's own private, unique, individual possession'". (end quote, Word Studies in the New Testament, Volume III, "Jesus of Nazareth - Who is He?"; page 37).

Having defined the peculiarity of the pronoun, Mr. Wuest explains the meaning intended in his own words as follows:

"That is, Jesus claimed to own God as His Father in a way different from the way in which believers have God as their Father. His relationship to God as His Son was different, uniquely different, from that relationship sustained by every person who claims sonship" (end quote, same source, page 37).

In commenting on the pronoun "his" in John 5:18, A. T. Robertson similarly testifies:

"'His own'...in a sense not true of others" (end quote, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume V, "The Fourth Gospel", page 83).

Marvin Vincent similarly states of the meaning of the "his" of John 5:18 as follows:

"His Father...Properly, His own Father" (end quote, Word Studies in the New Testament, Volume II, "Gospel of John", page 134).

The King James translates "his" in John 5:18. This however, does not bring out the uniqueness of what Christ actually said. The King James translates the Greek word by "his" in John 5:18, but translates the exact same word by "his own" in Acts 1:7 and Romans 8:32, and by "private" in II Peter 1:20. The words "his own" and "private", rather than just "his", better convey the uniqueness of Christ's words, and also agree with the three scholars previously quoted. The marginal reference in the Scofield Reference Bible for the "his" of John 5:18 gives, "Gr. patera idion, his own Father. The Jews understood perfectly that Jesus was claiming to be God. cf. John 10:33" (end quote, page 1120). Notice, "his own Father". This agrees with the text of the American Standard Version which reads in part:

"...but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (end quote).

The New International Version also reads in part as follows:

"...but he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (end quote).

To call "God his Father" would not make "himself equal with God". But, to call "God his own private Father", as the word means, and is so translated in other places, would speak of a uniqueness which "the Jews" did not miss. They were grossly offended by Christ's words. A fact often missed is this: John 5:18 is not what "the Jews" said about Jesus. John is the one who said it under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I have never read a scholar who questioned, or denied this fact. "Equal with God" is what the inspired man said, and this squares exactly with another inspired man, "equal with God", in Philipians 2:6.

When Christ used the words "my Father" throughout the Gospels, most people would neither see, nor think of uniqueness, that is of a relationship between Christ and God the Father which no one else bears. Yet, a close examination of His words proves conclusively that such is indeed the case. Repeatedly, Christ addressed the children of God. Yet, He always referred to "thy Father", or "your Father", but never did He speak of "Our Father", as if to express a relationship to God the Father, common to all, including Himself. Notice 15 examples of this in Matthew 5,6,7 as follows:

1. "Your Father" (5:16), not our Father;
2. "Your Father" (5:45), not our Father;
3. "Your Father" (5:48), not our Father;
4. "Your Father" (6:1), not our Father;
5. "Thy Father" (6:4), not our Father;
6. "Thy Father" (6:6), not our Father;
7. "Thy Father" (6:6), not our Father;
8. "Your Father" (6:8), not our Father;
9. "Your...Father" (6:14), not our Father;
10. "Your Father" (6:15), not our Father;
11. "Thy Father" (6:18), not our Father;
12. "Thy Father" (6:18), not our Father;
13. "Your...Father" (6:26), not our Father;
14. "Your...Father" (6:32), not our Father;
15. And, "your Father" (7:11), not our Father;

These words were spoken to "his disciples" (Matthew 5:1). If

Christ had wanted to speak of a relationship to God the Father which every Son of God bears, He should have said "our Father" in each case. But, He did not in a single case.

Let us notice now several other examples that show the uniqueness of Christ's relationship to God the Father as follows:

1. Matthew 25:34, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Here, Christ again addresses God's children. If He was a son of God, no more than any other son of God, He should have said "our Father" and "us". Instead, He says, "my Father...you".

2. Matthew 26:29, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it in new with you in my Father's kingdom." Here, Christ again addresses God's children. If He intended to convey a relationship to God the Father, which every son of God bears, He should have said "our Father's kingdom". Instead, He says, "you...My Father's".

3. Luke 24:49, "And, behold, I send the promise of My father upon you: but tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Here, Christ again address God's children. Yet, He does not speak of "the promise of our Father," as if intending to convey something in common with all of God's children. He says, "My Father...you".

4. John 20:17, "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." In sending a message to His "brethren", He very well could have said, "our Father" and "our God", if His sonship was no different than that of every son of God. But, as in all the previous examples, He never says "our", but "my" and "your". His words, throughout the Gospels, of which these selections are representative of a larger class, express the set purpose of the Lord to place Himself in a different relationship to the Father from that which His followers occupy.

Therefore, when Christ used the words "my Father" in context, those words definitely pointed to uniqueness, a relationship to the Father which no other son of God bears. On one occasion, Christ did use the words, "Our Father". And, that occasion is found in Luke 11:2 which

reads in part:

"And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven..."

These words followed the request of "one of his disciples" in verse 1, "Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." His words which follow in verses 2-4 do not involve something that He himself prayed. They involve His instruction as to the manner in which others were to pray.

The Lord never prayed according to the pattern given in Luke 11:2-4. Therefore, the words "our Father" were not something that He prayed. The proof that He did not pray according to the pattern given in Luke 11:2-4 can be seen best by considering two statements within that framework. Notice, "...when ye pray, say, ...forgive us our sins...", verses 2,4. The Lord had no sin. Therefore, He never prayed, "forgive us our sins". Those words were a guideline for others to use, not something He used. Notice a second statement, "...when ye pray, say, Our Father which art in Heaven...", verse 2. We have already shown that Christ never prayed "our Father". But, let the record show that He also never attached the words "which art in heaven" when praying to His Father. In Luke 22:41,42, "And he...prayed, saying, Father...". Notice the absence of the words, "which art in heaven". See also Luke 23:24,46 and Matthew 26:53. Why does He omit the words, "which art in heaven"? We have already shown that the attributes of God, one of which is omnipresence, were possessed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, in praying, He habitually thought of God the Father in the closest relationship to Himself.

Christ's reference to "My Father", and John's explanation of those words by the use of the pronoun "his", from a Greek word which means "one's own, private" possession, conveyed a uniqueness which "the Jews" did not miss. How did they understand His words? John recorded, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him because he...said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." They understood His words as a claim to Deity. These monotheistic Jews were not willing to accept such a claim. Therefore, they reacted in the same manner recorded in John 8:59 and John 10:34 in view of similar claims in John 8:58 and John 10:30, which they also interpreted as claims to deity.

If "the Jews" were mistaken in what Christ said, either John, inspired of God to pen the record, or Christ, who is "the truth", yea "the faithful and true witness", should have cleared up the

misconception. But, since neither cleared up the matter, the truth is forever settled, "equal with God", being the same essence.

In John 5:17, Christ said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." These words are about as unique as Christ's use of "My Father". No servant of God ever spoke such words, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Christ cannot possibly be inactive when God the Father is working. The "Father worketh hitherto", or "even until now" as the American Standard Version gives it. Whenever the Father works, the Son works. The relation is not, as one has said, "that of imitation, or example, but of equality of will and procedure." Since One works, the Other works. Christ did nothing in healing the impotent man, except the will of His Father. Therefore, to accuse Christ in either what He did on the sabbath day, or required the impotent man to do, is in reality to accuse the Father.

Christ, being one with God, can do nothing apart from Him. Thus, He said, "verily, verily, I say unto you, The son can do nothing of Himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). It is not simply that He does not act independently of the Father, but He cannot. Whatever the Father does, He does. There is a continual contemplation of the Father by the Son, as one said, "an uninterrupted communion."

Men may expect Christ to do more, or less than what He said and did, but He could do no less than the will of the Father. Some point to what He did, or did not do, as a blemish, or limitation, which amounts to a defect. "The Son" could not act independently of the Father. Why? Because, in will He was absolutely and perfectly one with the Father. There are not two absolute wills, one of the Father and one of the Son, opposing each other. There is one will of God. When "the Son" speaks or acts, it is always in the conscious knowledge that the will of God is being done. If Christ would have done some of the things that He was expected to do, as in Matthew 4:3 and Matthew 27:40, it would have proved impotence rather than omnipotence.

Having a right estimate of the Person of Christ is essential to being saved. Christ said, "...if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). What He did for sinners is only of value because of who He is, "equal with God".

Those who deny the Deity of Christ cannot possibly "honor the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:23). Does your sectarian teaching "honor the son, even as they honor the Father"?