

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
10:31-42

31. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32. Jesus answered them, Many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those works do ye stone me? 33. The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God. 34. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35. If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), 36. Say ye of him, whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, You blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God? 37. If I do not the works of my Father, do not believe me; 38. but if I do, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father *is* in me, and I in him. 39. Therefore they sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hand. 40. And went away again beyond Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and there he abode. 41. And many came to him and said, John did no miracle, but all things that John spoke about this man were true. 42. And many believed in him there.

31.--[*The the Jews...to stone him.*] The conduct of the Jews is just the same as it was when our Lord said "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:59). They regarded His words as blasphemy and proceeded to take the law into their own hands, as they did in Stephen's case, and to inflict the punishment due to blasphemy. (See Lev. 24:14-16.) "He who blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him". (So Num. 15:36, 1 Kings 21:13.) The Jews, of course, had no power to put any man to death, being under the dominion of the Romans, and if they did stone anyone it would have been a sudden tumultuary proceeding, or act of lynch-law.

Let it be noted that the Greek word for "took up" here is not the same that is used at 8:59. Here it rather means "they carried." Parkhurst thinks this implies the great size of the stones they brought. No doubt the stones used in stoning to death were not pebbles, but large stones. Yet I rather incline to think that it shows that they had to carry stones from some little distance for their murderous purpose. We can hardly suppose there were suitable stones lying about within an old finished building like Solomon's porch, though there might be stones at a little distance, on account of the repairs of the temple.

Augustine remarks, "Behold the Jews understood what Arians do not understand."

32.--[*Jesus answered them, Many good works, etc.*] Our Lord here appeals to the many miracles He had publicly wrought before the Jews in discharging His commission as sent by the Father to be the Messiah, all good and excellent works in which none could find any fault, and He asks whether they proposed to stone Him for any of them. They had often asked for signs

and proofs of His being the Messiah. Well, He had wrought many such signs. Did they really mean to kill Him for His works? He had gone about only doing good. Did they intend to stone Him for this?

The expression "I have shown" is curious, and we should have expected rather "I have worked." It probably means, "I have publicly exhibited before your eyes and not in a corner, but in such a manner as to court the fullest public observation, many wonderful proofs of my Messiahship." (Compare John 2:18: "What sign showest Thou?") So St. Paul says that "God shall in His own time show the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:15). The expression is probably a Hebraism. (Compare Psalm 4:6, 60:3, 71:20, and Exod. 7:9.)

The expression "from my Father" points to the great truth continually brought forward by our Lord in this Gospel: viz., that all His works as well as words were given to Him by the Father, to be worked and spoken in the world, and ought therefore to be held in special reverence.

Hengstenberg observes that the expression "many good works" evidently supposes that John knew of many other miracles which he does not record, and that many had been done at Jerusalem beside the few that are recorded.

[*For which...stone Me?*] This could be literally rendered, "On account of which work of all these are you stoning Me?" Some, as Gualter and Tholuck, have thought that there is a slight tinge of sarcasm about the question. "Is it so that you are actually going to stone Me for good actions? Are not men generally stoned for evil doings?" Yet this seems an unlikely idea and is needless. Is not the meaning made clear by simply inverting the order of words? "For what work or action are you going to stone Me? Justice requires that criminals should be punished for doing evil works, but all the many wonderful works I have done among you have been good and not evil. You surely will not stone Me for any of these. Reason and your laws teach that this would be wrong. It is not, therefore, for my works and life that you are going to stone Me. I challenge you to prove that I have done evil. Which of you convicts Me of sin?"

Taken in this view, the verse is simply a strong assertion made by our Lord of His own entire innocence of any crime for which He could be stoned.

Hutcheson thinks that "some stones were already cast at Christ, and therefore He says, Do you stone Me?" Yet this seems needless. The present tense here implies only, "Are ye on the point of stoning Me?"

33.--[*The Jews answered, etc.*] Our Lord's confident challenge, as in chapter 8:46, seems to have been found unanswerable by the Jews. They could not prove any evil work against Him. They therefore reply that they do not propose to stone Him for His *works*, but for having spoken blasphemous *words*. The precise nature of the blasphemy, they say, is that "being nothing but a mere man, He made Himself God, or spoke of Himself in such a way as showed that He claimed to be God."

This is a very remarkable verse. It is like chapter 5:18: "The Jews sought to kill Him, because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal

with God." It shows clearly that the Jews in our Lord's time attached a much higher and deeper sense to our Lord's frequently used language about God being His Father than modern readers are apt to do. In fact, they regarded it as nothing less than a claim to equality with God. Modern Arians and Socinians, who profess to see nothing in our Lord's Sonship but a higher degree of that relationship which exists between all believers and God, would do well to mark this verse. What they say they cannot see, the Jews who hated Christ could see, This "cotemporaneous exposition," to use a legal phrase, of our Lord's words deserves great respect and carries with it great weight and authority. As a man our Lord was a Jew, educated and trained among Jews. Common sense points out that the Jews who lived in His times were more likely to put a correct sense on His words than modern Socinians.

Gualter observes how frequently wicked men and persecutors of Christ's people have affected a zeal for God's glory and pretended a horror of blasphemy. The accusers of Naboth and Stephen are examples; so also the Spanish Inquisition.

A. Clarke observes "that had the Jews, as many called Christians do, understood our Lord only to mean that by being 'one with the Father' He had unity of *sentiment* with the Father, they would not have attempted to treat Him as a blasphemer. In this sense Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and all the prophets were one with God. But what irritated them was that they understood him to speak of unity of *nature*. Therefore they say, 'You make Yourself God.'"

34.--[*Jesus answered them, etc.*] Our Lord's defense of His own language against the charge of blasphemy is very remarkable. It is an argument from a lesser to a greater. If princes, who are merely men, are called gods, He who was the eternal Son of the Father could surely not be justly chargeable with blasphemy for calling Himself the "Son of God."

The expression "your law" means the Scriptures. Sometimes our Lord speaks of two great divisions into which the Jews divided the Old Testament: the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:40). The "law" then included not the books of Moses only, but everything down to the end of the Song of Solomon. Sometimes He distributes the Scriptures into three parts: the law, the psalms, and the prophets (Luke 22:44). Here He uses one word for all the Old Testament and calls it "the law." By saying "your law," our Lord reminds His hearers that He appeals to *their own* honored sacred writings.

The expression "I said ye are gods" is drawn from the 82nd Psalm, in which Asaph is speaking of princes and rulers and their position and duties. Their elevation above other men was so great, and their consequent responsibility for the state of nations so great, that compared to other men it might be said "You are as gods." A King is called "the Lord's anointed" (2 Sam. 1:14). So "Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord" (2 Chr. 19:6). Princes and magistrates are ordained of God, derive their power from God, act for God, and stand between the people and God. Hence, in a sense, they are called "gods." Those who wish to see this subject fully worked out will see it in Hall and Swinnock's Exposition of the 82nd Psalm.

We should observe how our Lord appeals to Scripture as the judge of controversy: "Is it not written?" A plain text ought to settle every disputed point. He might have argued; he simply quotes a text. By so doing He puts peculiar honor on Scripture.

It is worth noticing that the Hebrew word rendered "judges" in our version of Exodus 22:8,9 might have been rendered "gods." (Compare Exodus 22:28 and 21:6.)

35.--[*If he called them gods.*] Here our Lord proceeds to show what was the edge and point of His argument. All turned on the use of the single word "gods" in one single verse of a Psalm.

It is not very clear what governs the word we render "called" in this sentence. Our translators evidently thought it meant "God." But why should it not refer direct to "your law" in the last verse: "If your own book of the law in a Psalm has called certain persons gods."

Chrysostom observes: "What He says is of this kind: 'If those who have received this honor by grace are not found fault with for calling themselves gods, how can He deserve to be rebuked who has this by nature?'" Theophylact says the same.

[*To whom the Word of God came.*] This is a rather difficult expression. Some, as Bullinger and Burgon, think that it refers to the commission from God which rulers receive: "they are persons to whom God has spoken, and commanded them to rule for Him." Some, as Alford, think it simply means "if He called them gods, to whom God spoke in these passages." But it may justly be replied that it does not say "God spoke," but "There was the Word of God." Of the two views, the former seems best. The Greek is almost the same as that of Luke 3:2: "The word of God came to John," meaning a special commission.

Heinsius suggests that the sentence means "*against* whom the word of God was" spoken in the 82nd Psalm, that Psalm containing a rebuke of princes. But this seems doubtful.

Pearce thinks that it means "with whom was the word of judgment?" and refers to the Septuagint version of 2 Chr. 19:6.

It deserves notice that it is never said of Christ Himself that the "Word of God came to Him." He was above all other commissioned judges.

[*And the Scripture cannot be broken.*] In this remarkable parenthesis our Lord reminds His Jewish hearers of their own acknowledged principle that the "Scripture cannot be annulled or broken." That is, that everything which it says must be received reverently and unhesitatingly, and that not one jot or tittle of it ought to be disregarded. Every word of Scripture must be allowed its full weight and must neither be clipped, passed over, nor evaded. If the 82nd Psalm calls princes who are mere men "gods," there cannot be any impropriety in applying the expression to persons commissioned by God. The expression may seem strange at first. Never mind, it is in the Scripture, and it must be right.

Few passages appear to me to prove so incontrovertibly the plenary inspiration and divine authority of every word in the original text of the Bible. The whole point of our Lord's argument hinges on the divine authority of a single word. Was that word in the Psalms? Then it justified the application of the expression "gods" to men. Scripture cannot be broken. The theories of those who say that the writers of the Bible were inspired but not all their writings, or that the ideas of the Bible were inspired but not all the language in which these ideas are conveyed, appear to be totally irreconcilable with our Lord's use of the sentence before us. There is no other standing ground, I believe, about inspiration excepting the principle that it is plenary and reaches to every syllable. Once leaving that ground, we are plunged into a sea of uncertainties. Like the carefully composed language of wills, settlements, and conveyances, every word of the Bible must be held sacred and not a single flaw or slip of the pen admitted.

Let it be noted that the literal meaning of the word rendered "broken" is "loosed" or "untied."

Gill observes: "This is a Jewish way of speaking, much used in the Talmud. When one doctor has produced an argument, another says, 'It may be broken,' or objected to, or refuted. But the Scripture cannot be broken."

Hengstenberg says: "It cannot be doubted that the Scripture is broken by those who assert that the Psalms breathe a spirit of revenge, that Solomon's song is a common Oriental love song, that there are in the Prophets predictions never to be fulfilled, or by those who deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch."

36.--[*Say ye of Him, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse presses home on the Jews the force of the expression in the 82nd Psalm. "If princes are called gods, do you mean to call Me, whom the Father sanctified from eternity to be Messiah and sent into the world in due time, a blasphemer because I have said I am the Son of God?"

"Say ye of *Him*" would have been better rendered, Say ye of *Me*." The Greek leaves it open.

The expression "sent into the world" means that *mission* of Christ's to be the Savior, which took place when He became incarnate and came among us in the form of a man. He was the Father's "sent One," the "Apostle" of our profession. (See Heb. 3:1, John 3:17, and 1 John 4:14.) He who was so "sanctified" and "sent" might well speak of Himself as the Son of God and equal with God.

Calvin remarks: "There is a sanctification that is common to all believers. But here Christ claims for Himself something far more excellent, namely, that He alone was separated from all others, that the grace of the Spirit and majesty of God might be displayed in Him; as He said formerly, "Him has God the Father sealed" (John 6:27).

37.--[*If I do not the works, etc.*] Here our Lord once more appeals to the evidence of His miracles and challenges attention to them. "I do not ask

you to believe that I am the Son of God and the Messiah if I do not prove it by my works. If I did no miracles, you might be justified in not believing Me to be the Messiah, and in calling Me a blasphemer."

Here again we should observe how our Lord calls His miracles the "works of His Father." They were works given to Him by His Father to do. They were such works as none but God the Father could possibly perform.

Gualter observes what a proof this verse indirectly supplies of the nullity of the Pope's claim to be God's vice-gerent and head of the Church. What are his works? What evidence of a divine mission does he give?

Musculus also remarks that the Pope's high claims and great sounding titles are useless so long as his works contradict his words.

38.--[*But if I do, etc.*] Our Lord here concludes His reply to the Jews: "If I do the works of my Father, then, though ye may not be convinced by what I say, be convinced by what I do. Though ye resist the evidence of my words, yield to the evidence of my works. In this way learn to know and believe that I and my Father are indeed one, He in Me and I in Him, and that in claiming to be His Son I speak no blasphemy."

We should note here, as elsewhere, our Lord's strong and repeated appeals to the evidence of His miracles. He sent to John the Baptist and desired him to mark His works, if he would know whether He was "the coming One." "Go and tell John what ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight," etc. (Matt. 11:4). Just so He argues here.

Let us note the close and intimate union that exists between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity: "The Father is in Me, and I in Him." Such language can never be reconciled with the views of Socinians.

"By these words," says Bloomfield, "our Lord meant communion of mind and equality of power. It is plain that the Jews clearly understood that He claimed and ascribed to Himself the attributes of Godhead and made Himself equal with the Father."

Chrysostom remarks that our Lord seems to say, "I am nothing different from what the Father is, so however as that I remain Son; and the Father is nothing different from what I am, so however as that He remains Father. He who knows Me has known the Father, and learned the Son."

39.--[*Therefore they sought again to take Him.*] Here we see the utter insensibility of our Lord's hardened enemies to any argument or appeal to their reason. In spite of what He had now said, they showed a determination to go on with their wicked designs, and tried again to lay violent hands on Him. Nothing seems to harden the heart and take away the reasoning faculty so completely as obstinate resistance to plain evidence.

[*But He escaped out of their hand.*] This would be literally rendered, "And He came forth out of their hand," as in Luke 4:30 and 8:59 of this Gospel. The escape seems to have been effected by miracle. A restraint was put on the hands of His enemies, and their eyes were temporarily blinded.

40.--[*And went away...where John...baptized.*] I know not to what the expression "again" can refer here except to the time when our Lord began His ministry by coming to be baptized by John at Bethabara beyond Jordan (see John 1:28). I do not find that He had been there again during the three years of His ministry. There is something touching and instructive in the choice of this place. Where our Lord began His ministry, there He resolved to end it. It would remind His Jewish hearers that John the Baptist had repeatedly proclaimed Him as "the Lamb of God," and they could not deny John's divine mission. It would remind His own disciples of the first lessons which they learned under their Master's teaching and recall old things to their minds. It is good to revisit old scenes sometimes. The flesh needs many helps to memory.

Henry makes the quaint remark: "The Bishop of our souls came not to be fixed in one See, but to go about from place to place doing good."

[*And there He abode.*] Our Lord must evidently have remained here between three and four months--from the feast of dedication to the last passover, when he was crucified; that is, from winter to Easter. Where precisely and with whom He stayed we do not know. It must have been a solemn and quiet season to Himself and His disciples.

Musculus observes that this verse teaches us that it is lawful to regard localities in which great spiritual works have been done, with more than ordinary reverence and affection.

41.--[*And many came to him, etc.*] Our Lord's choice of an abode seems to have had an excellent effect. It was not so far from Jerusalem but that "many" could come to hear Him, as they did to hear John the Baptist. There, on the very spot where John, now no longer living, used to preach to enormous crowds and baptize, they could not help being reminded of John's repeated testimony to Christ. And the consequence was that they said, "John, whom we believe to have been a prophet, certainly did no miracles, but everything that he said of this Jesus as the coming One, whose shoes he was not worthy to wear, was true. We believed John to be a prophet sent of God. Much more ought this man to be believed."

Let us observe that John's preaching was not forgotten after his death, though it seemed to produce little effect during his life. Herod could cut short his ministry, put him in prison, and have him beheaded; but he could not prevent his words being remembered. Sermons never die. The Word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9).

We never read of any miracle or mighty work being performed by John. He was only "a voice." Like all other ministers, he had one great work--to preach and prepare the way for Christ. To do this is more lasting work than to perform miracles, though it does not make so much outward show.

Besser remarks: "John is a type of every servant of Christ. The gift of working miracles, imparted but to few, we can do without if only one hearer testify of us, 'All things that they spoke of Christ are true.' If only our preaching, though it may last longer than three years, is sealed as the true witness of Christ through the experience of those who believe and are

saved, then we shall have done miracles enough."

42.--[*And many believed in him there.*] Whether this was head belief--the faith of intellectual conviction, or heart belief--the faith of reception of Christ as a Savior, we are left in doubt. We have the same expression in 8:30 and 11:45. Yet we need not doubt that very many Jews, both here and elsewhere, were secretly convinced of our Lord's Messiahship, and after His resurrection came forward and confessed their faith and were baptized. It seems highly probable that this accounts for the great number converted at once on the day of Pentecost and at other times. (See Acts 4:4, 6:7, and 21:20.) The way had been prepared in their hearts long before by our Lord's own preaching, though at the time they had not courage to avow it. The good that is done by preaching is not always seen immediately. Our Lord sowed, and His Apostles reaped, all over Palestine.

Chrysostom has a long and curious comment on this verse. He draws from it the great advantage of privacy and quiet to the soul, and the benefit that women especially derive from living a retired life at home compared to men. His exhortation to wives to use their advantages in this respect, and to help their husbands' souls, is very singular when we consider the times in which he wrote and the state of society at Constantinople. "Nothing," he says, "is more powerful than a pious and sensible woman to bring a man into proper order and to mold his soul as she will."

Henry observes: "Where the preaching of repentance has had success, there the preaching of reconciliation and Gospel grace is most likely to be prosperous. Where John has been acceptable, Jesus will not be unacceptable. The jubilee trumpet sounds sweetest in the ears of those who in the day of atonement have afflicted their souls for sin."