

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
12:44-50

44. Jesus cried out and said, He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. 46. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness. 47. And if any man hears my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48. He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one who judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. 49. For I have not spoken on my own *authority*; but the Father who sent me gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak. 50. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting. Therefore, whatever I speak, even as the Father said to me, so I speak.

44.--[*Jesus...said.*] The connection between the address which begins here and the preceding verse is not very plain or easy to understand.

Some think that it is a continuation of the address which ended at the 36th verse, and that John's comment and explanation in the last seven verses must be regarded entirely as a parenthesis. This is rather an awkward supposition, when we look at the 36th verse and see at the end, "These words spoke Jesus and departed, and did hide Himself." Unless we suppose that as He was walking away "He cried [out] and said, He who believes in Me," etc., the connection seems incapable of proof. Yet it appears most unlikely that our Lord would have said such things as he was departing.

Others, as Theophylact, think that the address before us is an entirely new and distinct one, and delivered on a different day from that ending at the 36th verse: viz., on the Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday in Passion Week. This certainly appears to me the least difficult view of the subject. It would then mean that the day after the miracle of the voice from heaven, Jesus appeared again publicly in Jerusalem, and "cried [out] and said."

However, it is useless to deny that the abrupt manner in which the verse before us and the following verses come in is a difficulty, and one which we know not exactly how to explain. One thing only is very clear: this was probably one of the last public discourses which our Lord delivered in Jerusalem, and forms a kind of conclusion to His ministry in that city. It is a short but solemn winding up of all His public testimony to the Jews.

It deserves notice that some, as Tittman, Stier, Olshausen, Tholuck, Bloomfield, and Alford, consider the whole of the passage, from verse 44 to the end of the chapter, to be not the words of Jesus Christ but a statement of John the Baptist himself concerning the doctrine Jesus taught throughout His ministry, and specially at Jerusalem. From this view, however, I strongly dissent. The beginning, "Jesus cried [out]," etc., seems utterly inconsistent with the theory. There seems no special necessity for adopting it. A plain reader of the chapter would never dream of it.

It is worth remarking that the Greek expression, "He cried," is very seldom applied to our Lord in the New Testament. It is found in Matt. 27:50, Mark 15:39, John 7:28-37, and here. In every instance it means a loud cry, such as anyone uses to call attention to what he has to say.

Flacius thinks that the address beginning here is a kind of peroration and summing up of all our Lord's public teaching to the Jews. In it He repeats the proclamation of His own Divine office and dignity, the purpose for which He came, to be a "light", the danger of neglecting His testimony, the certainty of a final judgment, and the direct procession of His doctrine from the Father.

[*He who believes...Him who sent Me.*] This remarkable expression seems meant to proclaim, for the last time, the great truth so often insisted on by our Lord--the entire unity between Himself and the Father. Once more Jesus declares that there is such a complete and mysterious oneness between Himself and the Father that he who believes on Him believes not only on Him but on Him who sent Him. Of course, the sentence cannot literally mean that the man who believes in Christ does *not* believe in Christ. But according to a mode of speech not uncommon in the New Testament, our Lord taught that all who in obedience to His call put their trust in Him would find that they were not trusting in the Son only but in the Father *also*. In short, to trust in the Son, the sent Savior of sinners, is to trust also in the Father who sent Him to save. The Son and the Father cannot be divided, though they are distinct Persons in the Trinity; and faith in the Son gives an interest in the Father. (Compare John 5:24: "He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent Me." And 1 Peter 1:21: "Who by Him do believe in God.")

To draw a wide line of separation between the Father and the Son, as some do, and to represent the Father as an angry Being whom the Son appeases, is very poor theology and the high road to Tritheism. The true doctrine is that the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is one, and that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons, and yet that there is such entire unity between the Persons that He who believes in the Son believes also in the Father.

Zwingle thinks the latent idea is: "Do not think it is a small and insignificant thing to believe on Me. To believe on Me is the same thing as believing on God the Father, and to know Me is to know the Father."

Bucer seems to think that the address in this verse was meant to encourage those who believed Christ to be the Messiah, but were afraid of confessing Him, to come forward boldly and acknowledge their belief.

Poole says that in like manner God says to Samuel, "They have not rejected you, but have rejected Me," meaning not you *alone*. (1 Sam. 8:7.)

45--[*And he...sees him who sent Me.*] This deep and mysterious verse proclaims even more distinctly than the last verse the unity of the Father and the Son. It cannot mean that anyone who saw Christ with his bodily eyes did, in so seeing, behold the First Person in the Trinity. Such beholding we are distinctly told is impossible. He is one "whom no man has

seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). What our Lord seems to mean is this: "He who sees Me sees not Me only, as an ordinary man or a Prophet, like John the Baptist. In seeing Me he beholds one who is one with the Father, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person" (Heb. 1:3). Of course our Lord did not literally mean, "He who sees Me does not see Me." But He meant, "He who sees Me sees not only Me, but through Me and by Me he sees Him who sent Me, for we cannot be divided."

The divinity of Jesus Christ seems incontrovertibly proved by this verse and the preceding one. If to believe in Christ is to believe in the Father, and to see Christ is to see the Father, then Jesus Christ must be equal with the Father--very and eternal God.

The supposition of some--that the first "sees" in this verse means nothing more than "sees by faith"--appears rather incredible. At this rate the verse would be only a repetition of the one preceding it. I prefer the idea that "sees" means literally "Sees with his bodily eyes." Yet Bengel says that "sees" refers to that vision which faith accompanies, and compares it to John 6:40.

The object our Lord had in view in this and the preceding verse appears to have been twofold. It was partly to proclaim once more the unity of Himself and the Father. It was partly to encourage all believers in Himself, for the last time, before He was crucified. Let them know that in resting their souls on Him, they were resting not on Him alone who died on Calvary, but on one who was one with the Father, and therefore were resting on the Father.

Chrysostom observes on the expression "sees Him who sent me:" "What then? Is God a body? By no means. The seeing of which Jesus here speaks is that of the mind, thence showing the consubstantiality."

Barnes observes that this language could not have been used about any mere man. To say it of Paul or Isaiah would have been blasphemy.

46.--[*I have come as a light, etc.*] In this sentence our Lord proclaims once more the great end and object of His coming into the world. He does it by using His favorite figure of light and comparing Himself to the sun. "I have come into a world full of darkness and sin, to be the source and center of life, peace, holiness, happiness to mankind, so that every one who receives and believes in Me may be delivered from darkness and walk in full light."

Let us note that the form of language used here seems to teach that our Lord existed before He entered the world. The saints "are the light of the world," but they do not "come a light into the world." This could only be said of Christ, who was light before His incarnation, just as the sun exists and shines before it rises above the eastern horizon.

Let us note that our Lord's language seems to teach that He came to be a common Savior and Messiah for all mankind, just as the sun shines for the good of all. It is as though He said, "I have arisen on the world like the sun in the firmament of heaven, in order that every one who is willing to

believe in Me should be delivered from spiritual darkness and be enabled to walk in the light of spiritual life."

Once more we may remember that none could give such a majestic description of His mission, but one who knew and felt that He was very God. We never find Moses, John the Baptist, Paul, or Peter using such language as this.

The quantity of precious truth taught and implied in this verse is very noteworthy. The world is in darkness. Christ is the only light. Faith is the only way to have interest in Christ. He who believes no longer abides in darkness but has spiritual light. He who does not believe remains and continues in a state of darkness, the prelude to hell.

The expression, "not abide in darkness," seems to have a latent reference to those Jews who were convinced of Christ's Messiahship but were afraid to confess Him openly. Such persons are here exhorted not to remain, stick fast, and continue in darkness.

Burgon remarks on this verse: "This verse shows that (1) Christ existed before His incarnation, even as the sun exists before it appears above the eastern hills; (2) that Christ is the one Savior of the world, even as there is only one sun; (3) that He came not for one nation but for all, as the sun shines for all the world."

47.--[*And if any man...does not believe.*] Having shown the privilege of those who believe in Him, our Lord now shows the danger and ruin of those who hear His teaching and yet believe not.

[*I do not judge him.*] These words can only mean, "I judge him not now." To put more on them would contradict the teaching of other places, where Christ is spoken of as the Judge of all at the last day. Our Lord's meaning evidently is to teach that His First Advent was not for judgment but for salvation, not to punish and smite as a conqueror but to heal and save as a physician.

[*For I did not come to judge, etc.*] These words are an expansion and explanation of the preceding sentence, "I judge him not." They are evidently meant to correct the Jewish impression that Messiah was to come only to judge, to execute vengeance, to smite down His enemies, and to punish His adversaries. This impression arose from misapplied views of the Second Advent and the judgment yet to come. Our Lord, for the last time, declares that He came for no such purpose. Wicked as unbelief was, He did not come to punish it now. He came not as a judge at His First Advent, but as a Savior.

We must take care, however, that we do not misinterpret this sentence. It affords no countenance to the dangerous doctrine of universal salvation. It does not mean that Christ came in order to actually save from hell all the inhabitants of the whole world. Such a meaning would flatly contradict many other plain passages of Scripture. When, then, does it mean?

It means that our Lord came at His First Advent not to be a judge but a Savior, not to inflict punishment but to provide mercy. He came to provide

salvation for all the world, so that anyone in the world may be saved. But no one gets any benefit from this salvation except those who believe. The true key to the meaning of the sentence is the contrast between Christ's first coming and His second one. The first was to set up a throne of grace; the second will be to set up a throne of judgment. The expression in John 3:17 is precisely parallel: "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." If it were lawful to coin a word, the true exposition of the sentence would be, "I came that the world might be *salvable*."

But while I say all this, I am unable to see how such expressions as this and John 3:16,17 can possibly be reconciled with an extreme view of particular redemption. To say, on the one hand, that Christ's death is efficacious to none but the elect and believers is strictly true. Not all men are finally saved by Christ. There is a hell, and unbelievers and impenitent people will be found there. But to say, on the other hand, that in no sense did Christ do anything at all for the whole world, but that He did everything for the elect alone, seems to me utterly irreconcilable with this text. Surely Christ came to provide a salvation *sufficient* for the whole "world."

I am aware that the advocates of an extreme view of particular redemption say that "the world" here does not mean "the world," but the elect of all nations as compared to the Jews. But this view is not satisfactory and looks very like an evasion of the plain meaning of words.

Why the same Greek word is rendered by our English translators "judge" in this verse and "condemn" in the parallel place in John 3:17, it is not easy to see.

48.--[*He who rejects...has one who judges him.*] In this verse our Lord declares positively the future judgment and condemnation of those who reject Him and refuse to believe His teaching.

The word we render "rejects" is only used here in St. John's Gospel. The idea is that of "despising, setting at naught." (See Luke 10:16.) The person described is one who despises and sets at naught Christ Himself, after seeing Him, and deliberately refuses to acknowledge Him as the Messiah in spite of all the evidence of His miracles. He is also one who will not receive and take into his heart the doctrines preached by Christ. In short, he despises His person, and refuses to believe His teaching. "Such a man will find at last, though I punish him not now, that there is a judgment and condemnation of him. He will not find that rejection of Me and his unbelief will go unpunished. He has a Judge prepared already. There is one already, though he knows it not, who will witness against him and condemn him."

[*The word...judge...last day.*] Our Lord here declares that the things He publicly preached to the Jews while He was upon earth would witness finally against those who did not believe, at the last day, and be their condemnation. They will not then be able to deny that they were words of wisdom, words of mercy, words subversive of their false views, words fully explaining Christ's kingdom, words entirely in accordance with the

Scriptures. And the result will be that they will be speechless. The witness of Christ's words will be unanswerable, and in consequence of that witness they will be condemned.

We see here that the words of those who speak for God are not thrown away because they seem not believed at the time. Christ's words, though despised and rejected by the Jews, did not fall to the ground. Those whom they did not save they will condemn. There will be a resurrection of all faithful sermons at the last day. Great is the responsibility of preachers! Their words are always doing good, or adding to the condemnation of the lost. They are a savor of life to some and of death to others. Great is the responsibility of hearers! They may ridicule and despise sermons, but they will find to their cost at last that they must give account of all they hear. The very sermons they now despise may be witnesses against them to their eternal ruin.

Let us note that our Lord speaks of judgment and the last day as great realities. Let us take care that we always account them such and live accordingly. The Christian's best answer to those who ridicule his religion is to say, "I believe in a judgment and a last day."

Let us note that condemnation is taken for granted, if not directly expressed, as the portion of some at the last day. Then let us not listen to those who say that there is no future punishment, and that all persons of all characters, both good and bad, are at last going to heaven.

Zwingle remarks that the expression, "My word shall judge," is parallel to such expressions as, "The law puts a man to death," though it is not actually the law but the executioner that does it. The law only shows him to be worthy of death. So the works and words of Christ will show the unbelieving to be worthy of judgment and condemnation.

49.--[*For I have not spoken of myself.*] In these words our Lord once more, as if for the last time, declares that mighty truth which we find so often in St. John--the intimate union between Himself and His Father. "I have not spoken of myself, of my own independent mind, and without concert with my Father in heaven."

The object of saying this is evident. Our Lord would have the Jews know what a serious sin it was to refuse His words and not believe them. In so doing, men did not refuse the words of a mere man or a prophet like Moses or John the Baptist. They were refusing the words of Him who never spoke alone, but always in closest union with the Father. To refuse to receive the words of Christ was to reject not merely His words, but the words of God the Father.

Here, as in many other places in St. John's Gospel, the Greek does not mean "I have not spoken *concerning* myself, but out of or from myself."

[*But the Father...commandment...speak.*] Here our Lord explains and enforces more fully what He said of "not speaking from Himself." He declares that when He came into the world, the Father gave Him a "commandment," or a commission, as to what He should say and speak to men.

The things that He had spoken were the result of the eternal counsels of the ever-blessed Trinity. The works that He had done were works which the Father gave Him to do. The words that He spoke were words which the Father gave Him to speak. Both in His doing and speaking nothing was left to chance, unforeseen, unprovided, or unpremeditated. All was arranged by perfect wisdom, both His words and His works.

When we read of the Father "sending" Christ and giving Christ a "commandment," we must carefully dismiss from our minds all idea of any inferiority to God the Father on the part of God the Son. The expressions are used in condescension to our weak faculties, to convey the idea of perfect oneness. We are not speaking of the relation that exists between two human beings like ourselves, but between the Persons in the Divine Trinity. The "*sending*" of the Son was the result of the eternal counsel of that blessed Trinity, in which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are co-equal and co-eternal. The eternal Son was as willing to be "sent" as the eternal Father was to "send" Him. The "*commandment*" given by the Father to the Son as to what He should teach and do, was not a commandment in which the Son had no part but to obey. It was simply the charge or commission arranged in the covenant of redemption, by all three Persons in the Trinity, which the Son was as willing to execute as the Father was willing to give.

The distinction between "say" and "speak" in the Greek is not very clear. Burgon thinks the phrase is meant to include "every class of discourse; as well the words of familiar intercourse as the grave and solemn addresses." But I am not satisfied that this can be proved. A Lapede says that "to say is to teach and publish a thing gravely, and to speak is to utter a thing familiarly." Bengel, however, distinguishes them in precisely the contrary way!

There certainly seems to be an intention in the verse to refer the Jews to the well-known words of Deuteronomy concerning the Prophet like unto Moses. "I will raise up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words into His mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him." Our Lord's hearers, familiar from their infancy with Scripture, would see at once that Jesus claimed to be the promised Prophet. The Father's words were in His mouth. He spoke what was commanded Him. (See Deut. 18:18.)

50.--[*And I know...commandment is life everlasting.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be: "I know, whether you like to believe it or not, that this message, commandment, or commission which I have from my Father is life everlasting to all who receive it and believe. You, in your blindness, see no beauty or excellence in the message I bring and the doctrine I preach. But I know that in rejecting it you are rejecting life everlasting." Thus Peter says to our Lord, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68); that is, we know You have a commission to proclaim and publish eternal life. Thus our Lord says, "The words that I speak are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Poole and others say this sentence means, "I know that the way to life everlasting is to keep His commandments." But I cannot think this is the meaning.

Hall paraphrases the sentence, "The doctrine which by His commandment I preach unto you is that which will surely bring you to everlasting life."

[*Therefore, whatever I speak...so I speak.*] This sentence seems intended to wind up our Lord's public discourses to the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem. "Whatever things I am teaching now, or have spoken to you all through my ministry, are things which the Father gave to Me to speak to you. I am only speaking to you what the Father said to Me. If therefore you reject or refuse my message, know once more, for the last time, that you are rejecting a message from God the Father Himself. I speak nothing but what the Father said to Me. If you despise it, you are despising the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob."

Let us remember that the holy boldness of this last verse should be a pattern to every minister and preacher of the Gospel. Such a man ought to be able to say confidently, "I know and am persuaded that the message I bring is life everlasting to all who believe it; and that, in saying what I do, I say nothing but what God has showed me in His Word."