



## First Baptist Church Selmer

A JOURNEY THROUGH JOHN • "SHALLOW RELIGION" • JOHN 5:37-47 • 1/23/2022

### MAIN POINT

Strong religious beliefs or traditions do not guarantee one is truly saved.

### INTRODUCTION

Use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is a yearly tradition that your family does that means a lot to you?**

**Do you know of any traditions that others have that you really appreciate or would like to adopt on your own?**

Traditions are seen in many different ways. Some are very special to a person or family and others are things that you wish to get away from as you grow older. One of my favorite things to hear young people say is that when they grow up, they aren't going to continue to do certain things that they did when they were children. Fast forward a few years and it is something that they hold as special to themselves and their families.

Traditions are often times very good and meaningful but there are times that they can lead us away from what the true intention may have been when they started.

In 1636, a well-known Christian university was founded and adopted the following mission statement, "To be plainly instructed and consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ."

**Any guesses on what Christian university had this mission statement?**

If you guessed Union University, or Southern Seminary, or Dallas Theological Seminary then you have missed it by just a little. This mission statement was the founding statement for Harvard University. To say that the university has experienced a drift from its original founding would be

an understatement. What started as an institution that traditionally wanted to educate people from a Biblical worldview has drifted from its roots into what we know today. Former Harvard president, Larry Summers once stated, "Things divine have been central neither to my professional nor to my personal life."

We will look today at a belief grounded in a shallow religious tradition that became something quite different from its original intention.

## UNDERSTANDING

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:37-40.

**Who does Jesus clearly state is the One that sent him?**

**Jesus mentions the word "abide" in verse 37. What does it mean?**

Jesus states multiple times in this passage that the Father is the one that sent Him. Whether Jesus is emphasizing the importance of the Father or is making no room for speculation, Jesus speaks of His personal relationship with the Father clearly and often. Jesus charges the Jews for not truly knowing God because they missed the point. If God's Word lives inside of us or "abides" in us, then our lives will look different.

**Where does Jesus state that the Jews searched for the right answers?**

**Is there anything wrong with searching the Scriptures for answers regarding eternal life?**

**Why do you think the Jews were still missing it despite searching in the right place?**

The Bible tells us that, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence," God had given us everything that we need in order to know Him. Yet, head knowledge of God does not guarantee eternal life with Him. The study of Scripture does not by itself impact life. The Scripture rather bears witness to the One who gives life, namely, Jesus!

I heard a story one time of a man that pulled into a local gas station where he found two young men that were frantically searching for one of the young men's wallets. The old man said, "Boys, I saw a wallet on the left side of the road a few miles back." Within seconds, the men jumped into their truck and sped away in search of the wallet. A few hours had passed and the young men returned without luck. The old man asked, "Boys, did you find that wallet?" One replied, "No sir. We looked the last two hours for miles on the left side of the road but couldn't find it." The old

man smiled, "Well. Did you ever stop and think that I was traveling in the opposite direction from you. My left boys would be on your right." Within minutes the boys retrieved the wallet and returned to the store. As they thanked the old man he looked at them and said, "Boys, you can travel on the right road your whole life but still miss what you are looking for if you don't look in the right direction."

The study of the Bible ought to result in genuine faith in Jesus followed by obedience and transformation of our lives.

**How easy is it for us to search for answers but yet still miss the "forest for the trees?"**

**Which is harder, knowing what Scripture says or living out what it tells us to do?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:41-44

**For whose glory did Jesus say that the Jews sought after?**

**Why did Jesus say that the love of the Father was not found in them?**

Although the Pharisees were regarded as the most religious among Jews, even pagans recognized their religion even if they did not follow it. Yet, Jesus stated that was part of the problem. They sought recognition and the glory that came from being religious. Jesus was repulsed by it. He not only denounced this mindset but stated specifically that he did not come for His own glory but the Father's. Jesus showed that the Jews were in it for the wrong reasons. They didn't love God because they only desired to receive the glory that belonged to God for themselves.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:45-47

**Why do you think Jesus specifically mentioned Moses as he pointed out their error?**

**Who did Jesus say Moses wrote about in the first place?**

**How do you think the Jews missed it?**

Everything the Jews believed was rooted in the Old Testament law. If then Moses was the one that gave it to the people, he must be regarded or respected in that manner. Much to do with the religion of Judaism stems from the law and teachings of Moses. But Jesus spoke of something much deeper. Jesus stated that everything that Moses did was ultimately pointing back to Jesus

himself. Moses did not speak on his own accord but was foreshadowing another who was to come after him.

"But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" was the last statement that is recorded here in John 5. It was a weighty statement then as well as now. If Scripture is true, and Jesus is real, then what Scripture teaches is non-negotiable. Just like Jesus, we are to live sent, abide in the Word, and live to bring glory and honor to the Father's Name.

## APPLICATION

**How can we seek to not only know God's Word but to actively live it out?**

**How can you refocus this week to live a life that is sent, abide in the Word, and bring glory to the Father's Name?**

**How can you be sure that your relationship with Jesus is not based on tradition but on an ongoing, ever-changing, active relationship with Him?**

## PRAYER

God, help us to evaluate our lives well and remove anything that is done out of tradition instead of a loving, active relationship with You.

## COMMENTARY

| JOHN 5:37-47

5:37–38. Having already introduced the Father earlier in this section, Jesus now added him to the resumé, focusing on his will and his word. The idea of a universal fatherhood of God applies only to creation and humanity. When it comes to spiritual sonship, the issue is personal faith. Note how the rejection of Jesus is a “catch twenty-two” kind of problem. These denying Jews never grasped the Father’s testimony about Jesus because they refused Jesus’ testimony about the Father.

5:39–40. The fifth testimony is one you may have in your hands right now—the Scriptures. Some people have quoted this verse as a command: “Search the Scriptures”—but that is not permissible according to the grammar of the text. Jesus essentially told these combatants, “You are serious Bible students and study the Old Testament carefully in order to gain eternal life. Yet

you have been unable to see how your Scriptures prophesied my coming and, therefore, refuse the life that I bring.”

An open heart and open eyes will produce an open mind—but we begin with an open Bible. Not superstitious reverence, but practical use. Doubts concerning the Bible’s authenticity are only about two hundred years old. This should tell us something about the moral and spiritual squalor we see in the modern world.

Nevertheless, these passages also remind us that posting the Ten Commandments on the walls of school classrooms will not produce righteousness. The religious legalism of the first century shows us that. These verses also lead into the final section of this chapter. Tenney raises an important flag as we make this transition: “No less than eighteen unmistakable references to the Old Testament occur in the text of John, most of which are given a direct application to Christ, and there are other allusions in addition. If Moses (and the others) wrote of him, then the testimony would have to be admitted by his enemies as incontrovertible” (Tenney, p. 111).

5:41–42. The final two paragraphs close the sermon by condemning Jesus’ accusers. The people with whom he spoke had studied the Scriptures for several thousand years. From the writings of Moses to the appearance of the Messiah, they revered God’s writings, but they never understood them. Indeed, if they had grasped only the Pentateuch they would have been ready to receive Jesus as God’s Son and Messiah. They searched to find life and life was in Christ, but they never made the connection. Without the love of God in their hearts, they would be quite willing to accept imposters who claimed only their own testimony and denied Jesus in the face of all the evidence that attested the truth of his message. Verses 41 and 42 remind us of the Lord’s reaction to the “believing” Jews at the end of chapter 2: “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man” (2:24–25).

The word translated in the NIV as praise is *doxa*, the common Greek word for glory or honor. The word appears three times in four verses, indicating John’s emphasis on the rejection of Christ’s glory by his accusers.

5:43–44. Bogus messiahs had crowded the Jewish scene for at least two hundred years before Christ. Like some modern religious leaders, they drew attention to themselves—an attitude for which Jesus condemned his own disciples (Luke 22:25). And the attitude continued. As Ken Hughes puts it, “Jesus told them that another would come in His name and that they would receive that one. Subsequent historical accounts tell us that no less than sixty-three messianic claimants attracted followers. People followed them because their claims corresponded with the

desires of men. They offered easy victory, political power, and material advantage. Christ offered the Cross” (Hughes, p. 112).

So all the mutual glorification omitted serious worship, never finding the praise that comes from the only God. We have no trouble understanding how we must praise God, but how do we receive praise from God? Let us remember the people to whom these remarks were addressed.

Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jewish religious leaders of the first century made a big show of public worship, ostentatiously praying and giving in public (Matt. 23:5–7). But the true glory of God was present in Jesus whom they rejected. True glory comes only from God, and this entire discourse has to do with Jesus as the true representative of that glory. In *The Everlasting Mercy*, Robert Harvey Strachan offers more of the verse from which the initial quotation in this chapter is taken.

A trained mind outs the upright soul,  
As Jesus said the trained mind might,  
Being wiser than the sons of light,  
But trained men’s minds are spread so thin  
They let all sorts of darkness in;  
Whatever light men find they doubt it,  
They love not light but talk about it (Strachan, p. 47).

5:45–47. This entire chapter stems from the issue of Sabbath-breaking that John introduced as early as verses 9–10. Therefore, this question of Mosaic Law both begins and ends the chapter. The Jews were proud of their tradition, their knowledge of Scripture, and certainly proud of Moses. But according to Jesus, they really did not believe Moses. If they had, they would have believed and accepted the Christ of whom Moses wrote. Rejecting Moses therefore, they also rejected Jesus.

We can hardly miss the connection between the writings of Moses in verses 45–47 and the emphasis on Scripture in general in verses 39–40. The only contact these people had with Moses was through the Pentateuch, the section of Scripture that Moses wrote. But how and when did Moses write about Christ? Certainly one possibility is the reference in Deuteronomy 18:15 which John has already used in the discussion of religious leaders with John the Baptist (1:21). In connection with these verses you may want to review the text of Deuteronomy 18:14–22.

Tasker sums up the issue like this:

The tragedy however, was that the Jews had regarded the Mosaic ordinances, particularly those relating to animal sacrifice, as ends in themselves; they were not therefore, ready to welcome Him who was not only the supreme revealer of the divine will, the Prophet who was greater than all the prophets, but also the Priest who alone could fully atone for human sin. The law of Moses could not save sinners and give them eternal life; it could only expose their sinfulness. By such exposure Moses prepared the way for the Son of God who made forgiveness a reality and enabled men to receive praise from God. If the Jews, therefore, really believed Moses; if, in other words, they were really longing for divine forgiveness and for eternal life, they would now be believing in Jesus (Tasker, p. 90).

Gangel, K. O. (2000). John (Vol. 4, pp. 104–107). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.