

May 15th, 2016

THE UNHOLY TRINITY OF UNBELIEF

John 7:1-24

There is a battle of worship in our passage today. As Jesus converses first with his brothers, and then with the crowds in Judea, nobody will believe on His name. And Jesus tells us why: unbelievers don't believe in Christ, because that would mean they would have to stop seeking their own glory (v.18)

Unbelief isn't mainly an intellectual problem. Unbelief is mainly a heart problem. A worship problem. All the world knows God exists, and that He is glorious. **Romans 1:19-20** "...what can be known about God is plain to them, *because God has shown it to them.* For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been *clearly perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." There is no such thing as a true atheist. There are only pretend atheists who refuse to worship the Living God, because they love worshipping themselves.

Unbelief in Jesus Christ exists *because* the world is addicted to worshipping itself. We are going to see this in three distinct ways this morning

- ☆ The Heart of Unbelief: Hatred (v.1-9)
- ☆ The Will of Unbelief: Hostility (v.10-13)
- ☆ The Mind of Unbelief: Hypocrisy (v.14-24)

Doctrine

The main reason people don't believe in Jesus is because they love worshipping themselves. (Unbelief is self-worship)

I. The Hatred of Unbelief

1. The Jews seeking to kill Jesus (v.1)

v.1 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

Why were the Jews seeking to kill Jesus? So remember that when Jesus was in Jerusalem in chapter five, he healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda. This enraged the Jews because it was done on a Sabbath. Jesus justified his actions by saying that “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” And then we see the first murderous plots of the Jews in **John 5:18** “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.” After chapter five Jesus headed north to Galilee, but the Jews in Judea were still stewing viciously over Jesus words, and their desire to kill him had only increased. So at this point in the story, Jesus refuses to go to Judea.

2. The Feast of Booths (v.2)

v.2 Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand.

What is the feast of booths? 7 day celebration that the Jews held after their harvest to remember that God made them dwell in booths in between their rescue from Egypt and their gaining of the promise land (cf. Leviticus 23:42-43) The feast of booths was perhaps the most joyful of all the festivals of the year, and many thousands would be traveling to Judea. This meant, lots of crowds.

3. Not even his brothers believed in him (v.3-5)

v.3-5 So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” For not even his brothers believed in him.

We have a list of his brothers from **Matthew 13:55**: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (not Iscariot). Now James would go on to write the book of James and he was one of the main leaders in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15) But at this point, in spite of their growing up with Jesus, in hearing all of his words, in seeing of his works, Jesus' brothers did not believe. Now after Jesus rises from the dead, they become believers (Acts 1:14) but on this side of the cross, unbelief. And their unbelief of Jesus looks very peculiar.

The brothers don't have an *obvious* unbelief. They believed Jesus could do miracles, just like the thousands of people from last chapter.¹ They believed that Jesus spoke like no other man. They believed that if Jesus were to show Himself to the crowds that many people would flock to him. But v. 5 says they did not believe. So why then, did they advise Jesus to go to Judea?

Self-worship. The same reason the crowds wanted Jesus to be king in last chapter, and the same reason why they followed him around for more bread. Dear congregation, there are many people who follow Christ, not because they are worshipping Christ, but because they are worshipping themselves following Christ gains them something so they can worship themselves better. That was a major theme in the last chapter. People were following Jesus *not* for His sake, but in order to fill their stomachs, or their political agenda, or because He is the hottest thing going on right now and they don't want to be on the outside looking in.

What do the brothers *gain* if Jesus goes? I'm actually not sure. Piper thinks it's because if Jesus is made famous by the power of His miracles, these brothers will gain some of that fame for themselves.² Sproul thinks that they hoped that Jesus would use his power to free them from Roman bondage.³ Matthew Henry lists nine possible things that these brothers gain if Jesus goes

¹ Remember those people in chapter six believed in Jesus so much, that they wanted to make Him king (John 6:14-15).

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-common-root-of-unbelief-in-the-brothers-of-jesus-and-the-jewish-crowds>

³ R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL,: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg.130

and shows himself to the crowds.⁴ It ultimately doesn't matter what *specifically* they are trying to gain. Maybe each one of them had a different agenda. But at the bottom of all of their desires was *self*. And we see this in Jesus' response.

4. The world hates me (v.6-9)

v.6-9 Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

Notice what Jesus says about the world: "The world cannot hate you, but it *hates* me because I testify about it that its works are evil." There is no greater enemy that the world has than Jesus. The world is Christ's mortal enemy.⁵ The unbelieving world *hates* Jesus. The eternal Son of God, perfectly holy, just and true is claiming that all unbelievers hate Him. And He gives us the reason why: "...because I *testify* about it that its works are evil." When Jesus faithfully preached the gospel, he summoned the entire world to His courtroom, and He testifies that the whole world is 'guilty.' That's what faith gospel preaching does. It absolutely crushes the pride of man. It exposes our evil deeds. It reduces the idol of our self-image to a ruined sinner, stained, undone, without God and without hope in the world. And it pronounces the righteous sentence of death.

"All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) This is the *essence* of evil: falling short of God's glory, meaning exchanging the invaluable worth of God in our hearts for a billion lesser things. That's what sin is *mainly*. That's what evil is *mainly*, ignoring God's worth and value because we are addicted to our own. That's all the world does. It refuses to value God as

⁴ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. 5: Matthew-John*, (Iowa Falls, IA,: World Bible Publishers), pg. 962

⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII* (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks 2009), gp. 284

He ought to be valued, and Jesus says, that's evil. When the world hears Jesus declare it's deeds to be evil, it *hates* Him for it.⁶

And this is so obvious in our own time. Ask yourself, what will the proponents of the sexual revolution *not* tolerate? Telling them that they are wrong. How do they respond when told they are wrong? With hatred. The world is trained to avoid the concept of wrong altogether: "What's right for you is right for you and what's right for me is right for me." The only thing that has been deemed a sin in today's society is to say there is such thing as sin.⁷

When Jesus told His brothers "The world cannot hate you...", He is stating very plainly that His brothers are in consent with the world's self-worship. And "the world" as Augustine said, "cannot hate it's lovers."⁸ The world loves those who will worship at the alter of self with them. I will grant that the forms of self-worship look radically different. The sexually immoral person worships himself in a different way than the moralist. The Muslim worships himself differently than the Mormon. But all alike have self-exaltation and not Christ exaltation as the main motive for all they do.

So when Jesus says in v.6 "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here," He means that '...the time for *you to seek your own glory* is always at hand. That's all the world does, and that is all you do. My time to be glorified is not yet here. I will spill my blood on a Roman cross soon enough, and then you will see the glory of my Father.⁹ But that time has not yet come. Your time to glorify yourself, is always here.' In summary, these brothers wanted Jesus to

⁶ What do you do with that? Perhaps some of you so bothered that I said the word hate, that you have actually missed that it is Jesus who is saying this. Jesus said the world hates him. Is this how you view the world? If not, your dispute is with Jesus.

⁷ In the church this translates to the maxim "Today the only heresy is saying that there is heresy." In the world it's "Today the only sin is saying that there is sin."

⁸ Augustine, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7*, (Peabody, MA,: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), pg. 181

⁹ D.A. Carson has a different take on this passage, namely, that Jesus is not referring to the cross but rather to the providentially guided time in which He is supposed to go to the Feast of Booths. Not on the time table of His brothers, but of His Father. D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 307-308

show Himself in Judea, not because they believed Him to be God, but because they were aiming at self-exaltation, either because they were riding on his coat tails, or that they hoped He would overthrow Rome, or perhaps they knew that the Jews were trying to kill Him this was a quick way to get rid of Him. In any case, Jesus refuses to be used for such purposes.

II. The Hostility of Unbelief

1. Jesus didn't lie (v.10)

v. 10 But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.

It looks at first like perhaps Jesus wasn't honest with his brothers, because he said in v.9 "I am not going up to this feast." But now in v.10, He goes. But notice how v.10 ends "...not publicly but in private." Jesus did not go up to the feast in the way that they were demanding. In a way that promoted human worship, and their hunger for self-exaltation. He's going to the feast in a way that will show the world that He is seeking the glory of His Father. We'll see that in our next section, but first, let's see how unbelief becomes hostile in public.

2. Unbelief is tyrannical (v.11-13)

v. 11-13 The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

Lord willing, we're going to see next Sunday more of this confusion that the crowd has regarding Christ in v.25ff. But for now just notice the *tyranny* that unbelief produces. Jesus was the *talk* of the crowd, "yet" v.13 says "for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him." The whole crowd was whispering about him, and there was much disagreement. But even the speech that condemned

Christ was not spoken about openly, because apparently the Jewish leader's hatred was so enflamed against Jesus, that they would not allow any talk of Him whether it be good or bad. The best way to bury your enemy is to act like He doesn't exist. The leaders were clamping down on the people, excommunicating anyone who confessed Christ. **John 12:42** "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue;"

This is how unbelief will eventually act in every public square if left unchecked by the gospel. It will seek to silence it upon threat of punishment. There is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Just as it was in Jesus' day so is it in ours. We may not face this yet here in America, but our Christian brothers and sisters, especially in Muslim dominated countries, are being threatened with their very lives if they speak of Jesus publicly. Unbelief is never a private addiction. It seeks to silence Jesus in every sector in society. Even in the family. I have this VOM app on my phone, in which during family worship we plead with God for our persecuted brothers and sisters. We often read how this hostility towards Christ extends to people's very homes. Such that worshipping Christ in one's own home is deemed illegal in many countries.

Oh the evil of unbelief. It seeks to silence the very mention of Christ's name. Unbelief is the worst of all task masters, for it hates the God who made all things, and it is hostile towards anyone who would speak of Him. This is why Jesus has labored thus far in this gospel regarding the new birth. Unbelief cannot be overcome by self-will. Jesus is showing us, especially in this section, that unbelief is a wicked Jesus-hating phenomenon that cannot be overcome outside of the Holy Spirit granting the new birth. It takes a Spirit-wrought miracle for anyone to transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

III. The Hypocrisy of Unbelief

1. Unbelievers marvel at Jesus' teaching (v.14-15)

v. 14-15 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?”

So now Jesus is right in the middle of the Feast of Booths, crowds and crowds of people. His brothers wanted him to perform miracles, instead Jesus goes to the temple to teach. What happens? The Jews marvel, because Jesus speaks with authority and eloquence and they were impressed. But they can't understand where Jesus attained his learning. They know He didn't study under any of their approved teachers of their day. They were at a loss.

2. My teaching comes from God (v.16-17)

v. 16-17 So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

‘The reason you are impressed with my teaching, is because it comes from my Father. It doesn't come from this earth, nor does it come from my human nature, it comes directly from God. If just wanted what God wants, you would *know* that I am speaking from God. But that is the very thing you reject.’

Let's pause for a moment and reflect. Unbelievers *hear* a type of glory in the teachings of Jesus and they marvel (v.15). Jesus says the reason His teaching is marvel-worthy is because it comes from God (v.16). Then Jesus says that they would *know* His teaching comes from God *if* their will was to do God's will (v.17). Stop. This is curious. They could *know* Jesus' teaching came from God *if* their will was God's will. **In other words, knowing whether Jesus Christ is true, rests on whether you want what God wants.** You can't know the truth, until you want what God wants.

It's at this point, where I have to say, *this doesn't seem to make sense*. How does it make sense to say that *before* I can know if Christ is true, I have to *want* what God wants? How can wanting come before knowing? But this is what the verse says: “*If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from*

God” What I hear Jesus saying is that *when* my desires and passions line up with God’s desires and passions *only then* will I know whether or not Jesus is speaking for God or not. How does this help me? I have to will God’s will before I can know if Christ is true? v.18 helps us.

3. Glory seeking as an epistemology (v.18)

v. 18 The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

Jesus is saying, anyone who is seeking his own glory, that is, anyone who is worshipping himself *is not speaking for God*. But the *One* who seeks God’s glory above all things *is speaking for God*, and everything that *He* says is true.

So lets connect v.17 and v.18 together: v.17 says *if* we want what God wants, we can **know** Christ is telling the truth; and **v.18** says the way we can **know** if Christ is telling the truth is if He is seeks God’s glory above all things.¹⁰ **In other words, knowing the truth about Jesus is directly connected to seeking God’s glory.** If God’s glory is our chief concern, we will discover Christ to be telling us the truth, because we will see that He lives for the glory of God. If seeking our own glory is our chief concern, we will never believe Christ.

It is not an accident that John chapter seven follows John chapter six. Jesus said in **John 6:44** “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” This chapter we see why this drawing is necessary. The unbeliever hates Jesus (v.7), and he will never believe in Jesus until He he wills what God wills (v.17). These things are insurmountable. Will power will not work, because the will is the very thing that is bent on hating Christ and seeking after self-worship.

4. Your will is *not* to do God’s will (v.19-24)

In the rest of our verses, Jesus turns the conversation back to them. He has been defending His teaching. Now He’s going to make them defend their’s.

¹⁰ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/willing-gods-will-as-a-way-of-knowing-christs-word>

v.19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"

It is obvious that the Jews were contradicting v.17. In v.17 Jesus says that they would *know* if He is telling the truth, *only* if they *will* God's **will**. But what they doing? **They are willing against God's will by seeking to kill Jesus.** How is that doing God's will by putting an innocent man to death? Their whole beef with Jesus was that He broke God's law in healing the man on the Sabbath.

From a superficial perspective it looks like these Jews are zealous for God's will, because they are really going after law-breakers, or so it seems. The truth is, they don't believe God's law. Using the law as an instrument of self-exaltation is not believing God's law. Jesus points this out in v.23-24

v.23-24 If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

The point of Jesus' argument here is not the Sabbath per se. His point is to show how hypocritical these Jews were being. They were not making a right judgment. The law stated that eight days after a male child was born, he was to be circumcised. If this eighth day landed on a Sabbath, then the circumcision would still take place, circumcision was a work of God, and God's works don't contradict each other.

Jesus points out that He made a man's *whole body* well. We should immediately consider how circumcision and healing are very similar to each other. Both are works of God. Circumcision points to a spiritual restoration, healing is a restoration. Jesus reasons 'how can you be angry with me if I worked the works of God on the Sabbath in healing a man, when you do lesser works of God on the Sabbath in circumcision?'

And this is why they rejected Jesus' teaching. Jesus was after God's glory. They were after their own. They could not believe because they were not seeking the glory of God.

Application

Our Doctrine: The main reason people don't believe in Jesus is because they love worshipping themselves.

Believing in Jesus Christ requires the renunciation of self-worship. Jesus has already touched on this similar theme in **John 5:44**. "*How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*" The act of believing in Jesus Christ is the first act of worship any man or woman or child performs. Prior to initial belief, there is no worship of God, there exists only worship of self.

We can see from this passage that unbelief isn't mainly an intellectual problem at all. It is a heart problem. The human heart does not want to come to Christ. The human heart hates Christ (v.7), the human will is hostile towards Christ (v.13), and the human mind is hypocritical towards Christ (v.19-24). In the soul of every unbeliever is an unholy trinity of unbelief. This is why the gospel of John so stresses the sovereign grace of God. It's why the first teaching that Jesus gives us in this gospel is the new birth. Unless a man is born again, he will never believe. God must sovereignly grant the new birth if we are ever to overcome the self-worshipping addiction of unbelief.

Our Duty: Beware of the addiction of self-worship in the church

Self-worship is so easy to slip into in the setting of the local church. Because Christians, like you and me, can use Jesus to worship ourselves. Recall what we have seen since the beginning of chapter six. First, the crowds tried to use Jesus to please themselves in the political arena—they were going to make Him King even if it meant Him surrendering the cross. Secondly, the crowds tried to use Jesus to please their stomachs "Yea, yea Jesus, enough about you being the bread from heaven, just give us some food." Thirdly, we saw Jesus' brothers try to send Jesus to Judea, not because they believed in Him but rather

to serve their own private agenda. Fourthly, we saw the crowds turn against Jesus interpretation of the law. What do all of these events have in common? The rejection of the true Jesus in order to worship one's self.

Dear congregation, this can and does happen in the local church. In our local church. **Why do you follow Jesus?** Do you follow Him because He is your all-consuming passion in life? Or do you follow him because it is convenient, for now. **Why do you serve Christ?** Do you serve because you see that as you pour out your life in love towards others the gospel is more on display? Or do you serve because it strokes your ego? Or perhaps some of you don't serve because service would require you to get out of your comfort zone. **Why do you fight?** **James 4:1** "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Self-worship on the part of at least one party is always the cause of fights.

Do you see how easy it would be for us to be part of a local church, following Jesus, but actually worshipping ourselves? Dear congregation, let v. 18 be burned into your soul. "The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory;" Stop. IF you are acting or speaking or thinking on your own authority, you are seeking your own glory. Meaning you are worshipping yourself. If your own agenda is the only agenda you are seeking, you are worshipping yourself.

Continuing on in v.18 "...but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood" Only when we seek the glory of God in this church will we experience church life as God has intended.

Our Delight: Christ died for self-worshippers such as us

Consider the abuse aimed at Jesus in this passage. John opened by telling us the Jews were trying to kill Jesus (v.1). Jesus tells us that all the world hates him because He testifies that their deeds are evil (v.7). John tells us that the Jews would not allow anyone to publicly speak of Jesus (v.13). The crowd calls him a demon (v.20).

Why would the infinitely holy Son of God put up with such hatred and hostility and hypocrisy? Jesus from all eternity has been perfectly loved by Father. Jesus, when the Godhead made the angels, was the adoration of those holy beings every day of their existence. They ever live to cry out day and night “Holy, holy, holy.” Jesus who is infinitely happy, and infinitely wise, and infinitely strong, who could make a thousand worlds with people who worship Him perfectly, chose instead to come down to save God-haters self-worshippers like us.

This is inexplicable. Why would Jesus save people who have only given Him every reason to punish them in hell? Because that is the kind of God Jesus is. He loves to save ruined people. He loves to save people from the death trap of self-worship. He loves to turn pharisees and prostitutes and murders into saints and missionaries and preachers. And He does this by laying down His life. **Romans 5:6-8** “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Do you see? Christ died for the weak. Are you weak? Christ died for the ungodly. Are you ungodly? Christ died for sinners. Are you a sinner? You have been reconciled to God almighty if you trust Christ. If you let Him testify to you that all your deeds are evil, and then trust Him that He has taken care of all of them on the cross with His blood. You are saved. No more condemnation. No more fear of judgment. Everlasting life.