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(John 8:44). Next we note the Breastplate of divine righteousness to protect the heart from *the Accuser* (Eph. 6:11-18). Over all we have the shield of The Faith—it is both objective and subjective: the Promises of God for our succour and encouragement in His Word, which we become possessed of by personal faith in that Word: And then intimately related, the Sword of the Spirit, together with the holy *practice* of ‘praying at all seasons in the Spirit, keeping ever wakeful, watching thereunto in all perseverance. . . .’

The warfare may often be fierce, the work may seem hard and fruitless at times, the way to the Celestial City long and difficult, the succour and encouragement of fellow-travellers and brother-warriors fitful and tardy, the Devil may test our faith and our faculties in a variety of ways—but ‘the Peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus’; the ‘God of Peace shall be with you’; and ‘the God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly’!

## AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN’S GOSPEL

(Continued)

Prof. F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

### II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19-12:50)

(c) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND BY THE LAKE  
(John 4:45—6:71)

#### (iii) *The Father and the Son* (John 5:19-47)

Ch. 5, v. 30—*I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgement is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.*—From here to the end of the chapter Jesus speaks on the subject of witness—a subject which, as we have already seen (see note on John 1:7), is a main theme of this Gospel. It is introduced here by an assertion that the judgement which the Father has committed to the Son (vv. 22, 27 ff.) is executed righteously, because in judgement as in all His other activities the Son does not act independently of the Father, but

seeks and performs the Father's will. His judgement is that searching and unerring judgement carried out by the light when it shines into the darkness and shows everything up for what it really is.

v. 31—*If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*—In other words, a testimonial to oneself is no testimonial. If our Lord's claims were made without the Father's authority, there would be no obligation on His hearers to accept them. This argument was later brought against His claims by His Pharisaic opponents: 'Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true' (John 8:13). But He answered: 'Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true' (8:14)—because His witness was confirmed by the Father's (8:18).

v. 32—*It is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.*—So here, He appeals to His Father's testimony, upon which He enlarges from v. 37 onwards. But first He mentions another testimony by which His hearers might have been convinced if they had not been too prejudiced to admit it.

v. 33—*Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth.*—This was the testimony of John the Baptist. When he was approached by a deputation of Pharisees from Jerusalem, he told them of the Coming One who was preferred before him; and later he pointed to Jesus as this Coming One, and testified that He was the Son of God (John 1:19-34).

v. 34—*But the witness which I receive is not from man: howbeit I say these things that ye may be saved.*—Not that Jesus Himself relied on human testimony as a basis for His claims, but John's testimony might have been expected to weigh with those who recognized him as a messenger of God, and the acceptance of his testimony would have led them to salvation and life.

v. 35—*He was the lamp that burneth and shineth: and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light.*—When the Evangelist first introduces John to his readers, he makes it plain that John 'was not the light (*phōs*), but came that he might bear witness of the light' (John 1:8). But if John was not the light, he was a

light-bearer, a lamp (*lychnos*)—one that burned brightly and illuminated all around. The purpose of a lamp is to show the light, and John discharged this duty right well. As he proclaimed the near approach of the Coming One and the New Age, many of his hearers were attracted by his preaching and were glad to think that the longed-for day was so near, even if they trembled at the same time because of his announcement of wrath for the unrepentant. But instead of taking urgent action while John's lamp burned, they procrastinated, and now that lamp had been removed. But here was the Light of the world Himself, with greater accreditation than the Baptist could supply.

v. 36—*But the witness which I have is greater than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*—One of the ways in which the Father testified to His Son was in the works which He gave His Son to accomplish. By His accomplishment of these works, Jesus showed Himself to be the Son of God. These works were summed up in the achievement of man's salvation, the prime purpose of His coming into the world. To bring this work to completion was His very meat and drink (John 4:34). And the individual works which contributed to this one comprehensive 'work' were 'signs' to those who had eyes to see that the One who performed them was the incarnate Son. The Father, by giving Him these works to do, and Jesus Himself, by doing them, provide an assurance which is doubly sure.

v. 37—*And the Father which sent me, he hath borne witness of me.*—By commissioning Jesus to carry out the service proper to the Messiah, God marks Him out as the Messiah. But there is a further way in which God has borne witness to Jesus, and that is by the heavenly voice which acclaimed Jesus as Son of God at His baptism, together with the impartation of the Spirit to Him in a visible form (Gk. *eidos*, as in Luke 3:22) which convinced John the Baptist.

*Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form.*—Jesus' present hearers, however, had never received such audible

or visible communications of the Father's testimony to the Son. But God had communicated His testimony in yet another form, and this form was accessible to them all.

v. 38—*And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not.*—God had sent His Word to the people of Israel 'by divers portions and in divers manners' (Heb. 1:1); but had they received it? Those at any rate whom our Lord was addressing at this time showed that they had not, by their refusal to believe in Him. For He was the fulfilment of all the revelation previously given by God through prophets and wise men; those who appreciated the import of that preparatory revelation would have recognized Jesus as the One to whom it pointed forward. It was possible to have a minute knowledge of the letter of those writings which enshrined the former revelation and foreshadowed the final revelation, and yet not have the divine word which those writings recorded abiding within them.

v. 39—*Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me;*—'Search the scriptures' (A.V.) is excellent advice. But the people to whom Jesus was speaking did not need it; they were diligent Bible searchers. The form of the verb may be either imperative or indicative, but the indicative is more appropriate here. The verb itself (Gk. *eraunaō*) implies keen scrutiny, tracking down the teaching of Scripture. The tragedy was that these people, for all their minute and laborious exploration of the sacred writings, had never found the clue which would lead them to their goal. The goal at which they aimed was eternal life, but that life could be received only through Him to whom the Scriptures bore witness. The Scriptures are able to make their readers 'wise unto salvation', as Paul said, but they make it plain that this salvation comes only 'through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15). Time and again it is affirmed in the rabbinical writings that the study of the holy law is the way to the life of the age to come; the New Testament affirms that this is so only through Him who is 'the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth' (Rom. 10:4).

There is some evidence for an early variant punctuation of this text, thus: 'You search the scriptures; these writings in which you think to have life are those which bear witness of me.' In either case the sense remains much the same. The reference is, of course, to the Old Testament writings. That the New Testament bears witness of Christ is so obvious as not to require affirmation; but it is equally true that the Old Testament bears witness of Him, and this is the justification for the Christian retention of the Old Testament as an integral part of Holy Scripture. If the Old Testament does not testify to Christ, it has no religious relevance for Christians; the fact that it does testify to the living Word of God (as He in turn testified to it) means that it speaks the Word of God as truly to Christians today as it did to Israelites two and three thousand years ago<sup>1</sup>.

v. 40—*and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life.*—Although the Old Testament pointed to Christ as the One through whom men could have the life of which it spoke, these men, for all their searching of the sacred volume, would not come and receive that life from the only One who could give it.

v. 41—*I receive not glory from men.*—The theme of witness (*martyria*) now merges into that of glory (*doxa*). The signs which Jesus performed manifested His glory (2:11); the sign at the pool of Bethesda manifested His glory as lifegiver and judge. Those who refused to admit such testimony deprived themselves of life but exposed themselves to judgement. Had Jesus conformed to their ideas of what the Messiah would be and do, they would readily have honoured Him. But why should He seek such honour as they could give, when by doing the Father's will He could have the glory which God bestows?

v. 42—*But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves.*—By 'the love (*agapē*) of God' is meant here their love to God (in other words, 'of God' represents the objective genitive). Had there been any love to God in their hearts, it would have

<sup>1</sup> I have enlarged on this in a pamphlet *The Christian Approach to the Old Testament* (Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1955).

manifested itself by their acceptance of One who came to them in the name of God. 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments' (1 John 5:3), and chief among His commandments is this: 'that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 3:23).

v. 43—*I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*—The judgement upon those who refused the Messiah who came with such heavenly credentials was this—that they would readily follow a pseudo-Messiah who had no credentials but his own claim. A good instance of this came about in A.D. 132, when one Simeon Ben-Kosebah claimed to be the Messiah of David's line, and led a revolt against Rome. His claim was supported by Akiba, the most eminent rabbi of the day, who hailed Simeon as the 'star out of Jacob' foretold by Balaam in Num. 24:17. But Simeon's messianic pretensions involved himself, his supporters and the people of Judaea in the most fearful ruin.

v. 44—*How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?*—'The only God', rather than 'God only' (A.V.), represents the true text. Some ancient witnesses to the text omit 'God', reading simply: 'the glory that cometh from the Only One'. In any case, the cause of their unbelief is plain: 'they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God' (12:43). To admit the claims of Jesus would have won them 'the glory that cometh from the only God,' but at the same time they would lose the esteem of their colleagues, which meant so much to them. Thus they could have little sympathy with Him who saw so clearly the difference between the true glory and the false, and desired His Father's approval above all else.

v. 45—*Think not that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope.*—In the divine court their unbelief incurred sure judgement; but the Son of Man would not be their prosecutor, or chief witness for the prosecution. Had He wished to act in this capacity, it would fare ill with them; but He had come to save, not to judge.

No: the chief witness for the prosecution would be one whose name they held in high veneration. Moses, through whom God had given them the law in which they trusted, would testify against them.

v. 46—*For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.*—Among all the scriptures which they searched in the belief that they would find life there, they paid chief devotion to the Mosaic books. But these, like the other scriptures, bore witness of Christ. If their devotion to Moses and his writings were more than lip-devotion, they would accept these writings' testimony to the One who was now in their midst. But their repudiation of Him betokened that at heart they repudiated Moses and the prophets. Herein lay their condemnation. For men are regularly judged by the light that was available to them.

If we ask whether Jesus had any particular scripture in mind when He spoke of Moses as having written of Him, we may think especially of Deut. 18:15, where Moses says to Israel: 'The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.' We have already considered the Christian interpretation of these words in a note on John 1:21.

v. 47—*But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*—Jesus, by His own testimony, did not come to annul the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them (Matt. 5:17). For through Him God performed the promise that He had given through them. The words of the Lord of the prophets are all of a piece with the words of the prophets of the Lord. True acceptance of them carries with it true acceptance of Him, and *vice versa*. We may compare the last words of Abraham to the rich man in Luke 16:31, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead.'

(To be continued)