

Main Idea: In John 5:41-47 Jesus reveals the right response and exposes the cause of the wrong response to Him.

- I. Jesus identifies the need of the unbeliever.
 - A. We need to be saved (34).
 - B. We need to come to Christ (40).
- II. Jesus identifies the problem of the unbeliever (41-44).
 - A. Unbelief is not a primarily an intellectual problem
 - B. Unbelief is a glory problem.
 1. The unbeliever refuses to give glory to Jesus (41).
 2. The unbeliever lacks the love of God (42).
 3. The unbeliever has a big view of man and a small view of God (43).
 4. The unbeliever is more interested in man’s praise than God’s praise (44).
- III. Jesus identifies the deception of the unbeliever (45-47).
 - A. The unbeliever often thinks he is okay with God (45).
 1. Jesus’ critics thought Moses was on their side.
 2. Jesus said Moses was against them.
 - B. The unbeliever refuses to listen to Moses (46).
 1. Moses teaches us about Christ.
 2. Moses teaches us that we need Christ.
 - C. If the unbeliever won’t believe Moses, he won’t believe Jesus (47).

Implications: Ask yourself these questions...

1. In what are you trusting?
2. For whom are you living?
3. Whose praise matters most to you?

A couple of years ago I went to visit a man in our community that I had come to know through a set of circumstances over twenty years ago. The man had lost a loved one and I had the privilege to do the funeral service for that loved one, and ever since that day we’ve been friends. I don’t know how many times in the past twenty years I’ve gone to his home to let him see the love of Christ in my life. He’s not a believer and that concerns me greatly. I’ve prayed for him on a weekly basis for years now.

On this particular I felt compelled to be even more direct. As we sat there in his yard on this beautiful summer day I said to my friend, “We’ve been friends for a long time, so I hope this won’t offend you. I’m burdened for your soul. I won’t force the subject, but I’d love to talk with you about how you can have eternal life through Jesus Christ, if you’re interested.”

His response? He didn’t. He just looked the other way in silence and after awhile just changed the subject.

Last year I had a similar experience with a family member who likewise desperately needs Christ. “You know I care about you,” I said, “And I’d love to talk more with you about how you can know that you have eternal life, if you’re interested.” And again, just silence, then a change in the topic of conversation.

It’s a frustrating experience to offer someone the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ and then see them show no interest. Why don’t people want to talk about Jesus? Why do they resist Him? After all, we’re talking about the most important person in the universe, the Creator Himself who became a man in order to rescue helpless sinners, who died the most cruel death imaginable so that they might have eternal life, who conquered the grave and is preparing an eternal home for all who will trust in Him. Again, I ask, how is it that people can hear such good news about this person and show no interest?

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

The shocking reality is that Jesus Himself faced such indifference, and even worse, outright hatred and rejection. How did He respond to such response? We'll find out as we turn our attention this morning to the final paragraph in John 5.

In the text before us, Jesus is finishing a conversation with His critics. He's having this conversation because He just healed a disabled man on the Sabbath. That didn't sit well with a group of religious Jews who considered such actions work and therefore a violation of divine law. So they confronted Jesus about it. Astounding, when you think about it. Jesus had just healed a man whose body hadn't functioned for thirty-eight years, and rather than rejoice, these critics began to attack Jesus.

In an amazing display of mercy, Jesus responded to their abuse with an explanation. You'll see the miracle in the first part of John 5, but the rest of the chapter records the explanation Jesus gave His critics for His actions. He talked about His divine identity in verses 16-23, then about His divine mission in verses 24-30. As we saw last time, in verses 31-40 He presented external witnesses to support His divine claims. He presented them with the testimony of John the Baptist (33-35), then the testimony of His miraculous work (36), then the testimony of His Father (37-38), and finally the testimony of the Scriptures (39-40). "You want to know who I am and why I'm doing what I'm doing?" Listen to the witnesses. They'll tell you.

But the critics didn't listen. They were already plotting in their hearts how to rid themselves of this man who threatened their religious system.

How do you explain such a response? That's what Jesus does in the final seven verses of His sermon. In John 5:41-47 Jesus talks directly to these unbelievers about their negative response. What He told them is quite revealing and helpful. If you want to know how to better minister to your disinterested family members and friends and to the skeptics at work, then listen to Jesus. Jesus identifies three things about the unbeliever.

I. Jesus identifies the need of the unbeliever.

What's the need? It's not complicated. First of all...

A. We need to be saved (34). That's what Jesus told His critics in verse 34, "Not that I accept human testimony." In other words, Jesus didn't provide the testimony of John the Baptist for His own sake. Why then? "I mention it *that you may be saved.*"

There's the fundamental need of every person who's ever been born on planet earth, *to be saved*. Saved from what? From the penalty of their sin which is eternal condemnation. "Whoever believes in the Son shall not perish," Jesus told Nicodemus in 3:16. And then in 3:18, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already."

That's the sinner's predicament. He's under condemnation, and if his status doesn't change, He will be punished eternally for His sin.

So we need to be saved. Everyone? Yes, says Jesus, including morally upstanding, law keepers, like His critics. That didn't sit well with them. They didn't like hearing that they needed to be saved. They were good people, at least when they compared themselves with other people, which they did regularly. But the standard that matters isn't other people. It's God Himself. And the God who became flesh says that we need to be saved.

How does that happen? There's only one way.

B. We need to come to Christ (40). Which, according to Christ Himself, is what the Jews who needed to be saved refused to do. He told them in verse 40—"You refuse *to come to me* to have life."

There's the fundamental, bottom line need of the unbeliever. In order to be saved he must come to Christ, which means he must stop trusting in himself and in his own

supposed goodness, and stop trusting in his man-made religious system, if he has one, or whatever else he's been relying on for a right standing before God. He must stop trusting in substitutes and come to Christ and start trusting in Him alone.

Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Just come to Christ and be saved. So why then would any sinner ignore or resist that offer? It's because he has problem, one Jesus identifies next.

II. Jesus identifies the problem of the unbeliever (41-44).

He says in verse 41, "I do not accept praise from men." That's actually a difficult verse to translate because a couple of the words can be taken in different ways. He says, "I do not *accept*." The verb is *lambano* which can mean "to accept," but it can also mean "to receive" or "to take" or even "to obtain." I think "receive" best fits the context. And the verb tense indicates the activity is continual. "I am not receiving," says Jesus.

What aren't you receiving, Jesus? "Praise from men," He says in the NIV. The word is *doxan*, from which we get doxology. It means "glory" and "honor." That's what praise is, speaking words of honor and glory to another.

If you translate Jesus' statement literally, He says, "Glory from men I am not receiving." The ESV reads, "I do not receive glory from people." The KJV says, "I receive not honor from men."

I don't think Jesus' point is that He doesn't accept praise, for the truth is, He is worthy of it and will receive it forever and ever. The purpose of redemption is that saved sinners praise Him. I think He's saying that what He rightfully deserves He is not presently receiving, particularly from the people in His presence.

Why aren't they giving Him the honor that He deserves? He tells them why in verse 42, "But I know you." Jesus knew His audience. He knew everything about them, *everything*. According John 2:24-25, "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." And what did Jesus tell the skeptics in John 5 that He knew about them? He said, "I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."

That's very significant. According to Jesus...

A. Unbelief is not a primarily an intellectual problem. Why didn't my friend want to talk more about Jesus? Why didn't the Jews respond favorably to Jesus in John 5? It's not simply because the things of God don't make sense to them intellectually, even though they don't. It's not just because my friend can't hear the words that come from my mouth and process them, or read the words that I might show him from the page of a Bible and understand them in an academic sort of way. He can. He's got a good mind. He can carry on a good conversation about other subjects. Why not about Jesus?

It's because his problem isn't simply intellectual. Granted, the sin nature he received from Adam does affect his intellectual capacity to talk about Jesus. To borrow a description from Ephesians 4, his thinking is *futile* and his understanding is *darkened*. Unbelievers are "separated from the life of God because of *the ignorance that is in them* due to the hardening of their heart (4:17-18)."

I'm not denying that the unregenerate mind doesn't work the way God intended when he made it. I'm just pointing out that his mind isn't his only problem, and in fact, isn't his primary problem. You can't explain his unbelief in simply intellectual terms. There's something deeper, something more fundamental.

So what's his problem? In Ephesians 4 Paul says the ignorance of non-believers is due to *the hardening of their heart* (Eph. 4:18). So it's not just an intellectual problem. Unbelief goes much deeper, all the way to the heart. Now let's use Jesus' language...

B. Unbelief is a glory problem. “Glory I am not receiving from men,” says Jesus. There’s the root problem. In the beginning, man was created by God to give glory to God. But when sin entered the world, man began to give that glory to someone else, namely to the person in the universe he now loves most. That’s not God, but himself.

So the unbeliever has a glory problem and it shows up in four ways.

1. *The unbeliever refuses to give glory to Jesus (41).* Oh, he may use Jesus to get what he wants. He may even hang out with Jesus’ people because of the fringe benefits. But he refuses to give glory to Jesus. *I am not receiving glory from men,* says Jesus.

If not to Jesus, to whom does the unbeliever want the glory to go? To himself. He’s hung up on himself. Even when he does good deeds, he finds himself doing the deed for the wrong end. That’s why Jesus gave this strong warning in Matthew 6:1-2 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, *to be seen by them.* If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, *to be honored by men.* I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

Jesus tells us something else about this glory problem. Here’s why the unbeliever can’t give glory to Jesus.

2. *The unbeliever lacks the love of God (42).* “But I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.”

Is Jesus talking about love *from* God or love *for* God? Probably both for they go hand in hand. Jesus’ critics had never truly experienced the reality of God’s love for them and so consequently had never expressed true love for God. *You don’t have the love of God in your hearts,* says Jesus. Oh, they claimed to love God, but it was just words coming from a loveless heart.

Jesus confronted this same reality in Luke 11:42, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice *and the love of God.* You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.” What was their problem? They did good deeds—and you should do them, says Jesus. But they neglected the love of God.

In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus, quoting Isaiah, said, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

There’s the problem of religion. It can’t change a heart. You can teach an unbeliever to do good things. You can even make him religious. But in the end, he’s merely become a religious, do-gooder who still lacks a heart-felt love for God.

Yet that’s not all. His glory problem shows up in a third way, namely...

3. *The unbeliever has a big view of man and a small view of God (43).* Jesus says in verse 43, “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.”

You do not receive me, says Jesus. Earlier He told Nicodemus the same thing in John 3:11, “I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.” John 1:11 declares, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

So you won’t accept Me, says Jesus, even though I come to you in my Father’s name and authority. But even unbelievers are believers. Believers in what? Jesus says that if someone comes in his own name, you accept that person.

And false messiahs did come, as many as sixty-four according to some Jewish historians.¹ Theudas came, and so did Judas of Galilee (we learn about them in Acts

¹ MacArthur, p. 214.

5:36-37). Bar Kochba came in 132-135 AD who was called “The Star of Jacob” by Rabbi Akiba. Others have come since. In the end the Antichrist will come, says 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10. And they all have this in common. They came in their own name and people accepted them on the basis of their self-authenticating message.²

I’m thinking of a man who needs Christ but he doesn’t want to talk about that subject. He won’t receive the One who came from God. But he will receive someone that comes in his own name. That’s why years ago he became a Mason. He joined ranks with George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Gerald Ford. They were all Masons. So were Winston Churchill, Mark Twain, Ty Cobb, J. Edgar Hoover, and Harry Houdini.

Many people look at Masonry as simply a civic organization, but in reality it’s quite religious by nature, though it denies the fact. Just read its own documents and you’ll see. For example, in *The Pennsylvania Freemason*, Pennsylvania Grand Chaplain Charles H. Lacquement writes, “Freemasonry has been teaching for centuries...the capacity of man to reach a higher level of perfection through education and training...The philosophy of Freemasonry is to make man the master of his own destiny, to show him that there also is an immortality on earth brought by his actions; that he can, through his own efforts, ...inscribe his name in the ‘Book of Life.’”³

“Most Masons get involved with the Lodge out of peer pressure,” writes Ron Carlson and Ed Decker. “Their friends are in it or their grandfather was in it. Some go into it for business reasons: They see it as a way to progress in their business and social lives. Others are attracted by the secret, mystic rituals and symbolism of Freemasonry.”⁴

The question is, how is it that a person can show no interest in the One who came from God and yet shows great interest in a man-made organization that, in order to join, you must bow before a person you call “The Worshipful Master” and take a pagan blood oath? Jesus tells us how. It’s because the unbeliever who lacks the love of God in his heart consequently has a *big view of man* and a *small view of God*. That’s why he will accept what men tell him, often without even researching the facts, yet refuse to accept the One who came with the authority of God the Father Himself.

You’re in great danger, my friend, when people are big and God is small. When people are big and God is small, you won’t value God and the things of God as you should. You’ll make decisions based on expedience rather than truth, too.

If people are big in your life, here’s a question you need to ponder, the one Jesus asked His critics in verse 44, “How can you believe if you accept praise [lit. ‘glory’] from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise [lit. ‘glory’] that comes from the only God?” That’s interesting. The fourth way this glory problem shows up is that...

4. *The unbeliever is more interested in man’s praise than God’s praise (44).* “How can you believe,” asks Jesus, “if you accept praise from one another?” Don’t miss that. If a person lives for the praise of other people, that person is unable to believe in Christ.

Let me give you an example. Listen to John 12:42-43, “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved *praise from men more than praise from God.*” So there were Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus, sort of, but their faith fell short because praise from men meant more to them than praise from God.

² Hendriksen, p. 210.

³ John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge*, p. 88.

⁴ Ron Carlson and Ed Decker, *Fast Facts on False Teachings*, p. 71.

Last week I read the story about Akma, a young woman who lives in Malasia. Her father is Muslim and beat her mother when they went to church. Akma herself decided to go to church but was concerned that he father would beat her mother even more. “She told me not to worry about her possibly getting a beating,” Akma said concerning her mother. “She said she was ready for it, and the important thing was that her children would attend church.”

There’s a person who’s not putting man’s praise above God’s! So Akma went to church. And Akma’s father beat her mother and eventually left her and the children for another woman, saying they were all infidels.

Akma became a believer in Christ and soon after began to share her faith with her peers at school. So she took off her hijab, her Muslim head scarf, to make her new Christian identity known. Her headmaster demoted her from the top of the class to the bottom and her classmates rejected her. But she persisted for Christ. In time her peers began to ask, “How do you feel when you go to church?”

“I did not have to force them to follow me to church,” she shares, “because my lifestyle had changed so much. It was easy to share my testimony. The Lord has given me a passion and a desire to reach young people for him.”⁵

There’s another person who’s not putting man’s praise above God’s! But you won’t do that, says Jesus to His unbelieving critics. It’s worth noting, as Hendriksen points out, “The very name *Jew*—from Judah, meaning *praised*—constantly reminds them of praise, glory, honor; but it is the wrong kind of honor, springing from the wrong source, which they are seeking.”⁶

Now turn verse 44 around. Jesus says a person can’t believe if he accepts praise/glory from men but makes no effort to obtain praise/glory from God. So if you want to believe, what must you do? Start thinking about the praise/glory that comes from God, from “the only God,”⁷ says Jesus.

It’s true. Right now, Akma and her mother aren’t receiving any praise, not from men, but that’s going to change one day. Someone is going to praise them, and it’s His praise they’re living for now. “Good job, my children! You did well. Now come and enjoy your eternal home with Me!”

Are you seeking that praise, my friend?⁸ Jesus’ question is critical. *How can you believe if you’re seeking man’s praise but not God’s?* You won’t. Until hearing His praise is what matters most to you, then you won’t believe in His Son.

Kent Hughes said it well, “Finding the truth is as much a matter of the heart as of the mind. A man may say, ‘I’ve read the Bible, and I want to believe it, but I just can’t.’ But further conversation reveals he is having an affair or is short-changing his boss or is fudging on his income tax return. He *cannot* believe when he is in that state. Nor can the woman who says, ‘I’ve been reading my Bible for years and I cannot believe it,’ but she has an unforgiving spirit. The Lord’s Prayer says we are to forgive as we have been forgiven and that an unforgiving person is an unforgiven person.”⁹

⁵ *Voice of the Martyrs*, January 2011, pp. 8-9.

⁶ Hendriksen, p. 211.

⁷ John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

⁸ We’re told in Romans 2:29, “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s *praise is not from men, but from God.*”

⁹ Kent Hughes, p. 173.

My friend, if you really want to understand the Bible, then you must come to the Bible with a heart that's focused, not on yourself, but on God. Listen to Jesus. *How can you believe if you're more interested in man's praise than God's?*

We've seen the need of the unbeliever—he needs to be saved and therefore needs to come to Christ. And we've seen the problem of the unbeliever—it's not just intellectual, for his unbelief is a glory problem. Thirdly...

III. Jesus identifies the deception of the unbeliever (45-47).

Verse 45—"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set." Here's where the deception lies.

A. The unbeliever often thinks he is okay with God (45). The Jews in John 5 did.

1. *Jesus' critics thought Moses was on their side.* In fact, they were sure of it. Later in John 9:28 the Jewish leaders hurled insults at the blind man Jesus healed and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!"

But here's the shocker that surely got their ire.

2. *Jesus said Moses was against them.* "Your accuser is Moses," He says. That's the epitome of the deception of unbelief, to think you're okay with God only to hear that the one in whom you are placing your assurance is going to testify against you at the judgment.

So many people think they're okay with God, that when the final grades are in and the curve is applied, they'll pass the pearly gates. But they're fooling themselves. They're ignoring someone. *Moses.*

B. The unbeliever refuses to listen to Moses (46). "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." Notice that.

1. *Moses teaches us about Christ.* "He wrote about me," says the Master. That's interesting. He doesn't say the Torah teaches about me. He says *Moses* does.

If you've ever taken a religion class at a secular university, you've probably heard about the JEDP theory which says, in essence, that Moses didn't write the first five books of the Bible, but rather four unknown editors did (identified by the initials, J, E, D, and P). But please notice that Jesus ascribes the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses. He says that Moses *wrote about me.*

If you want to know about Christ, take note. Christ Himself said you can study the writings of Moses and learn about Him. Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Look at Genesis 3:15 and you'll see Him. Look at Genesis 22:18 and you'll see Him. Look also at Numbers 24:17 and you'll see Him predicted as a star coming out of Jacob. But He's not just in isolated texts, but throughout the Pentateuch. It all points to Him.

We see Him pictured in types and shadows, such as water coming out of a smitten rock. Paul says that rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Look at the manna falling and you'll see the one who is the Bread of Life. Look at the Tabernacle and its furniture and you'll see a type of the God-man who tabernacled with men. Look at the pillar of fire. Look at the Passover Lamb and you'll see Him, for 1 Corinthians 5:7 says that Christ is our Passover Lamb. Look at the bronze snake that Moses put on a poll in Numbers 21:8, and you'll see the sacrifice of Christ portrayed. Look at Adam (says Romans 5), at Melchizedek (says Hebrews 7), at Joshua, at David, at Solomon, and so forth, and you will see pictures of Christ. "The books of Moses are full of Christ-centered types," says William Hendriksen.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hendriksen, p. 212.

But don't stop there. Just look at the story-line and you'll see Him. God blessed a people and gave them His Law. Did it help them? It helped them see the depth of their sinfulness, how totally inadequate they were to fix their sin problem, and how much they needed a Savior.

Do you want to know Christ better? Then read Moses, my friends. He teaches us about Christ, and namely this...

2. *Moses teaches us that we need Christ.* In John 1:45, Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Luke 24:27 says, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Christ] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."¹¹

In Acts 26:22-23 Paul testified, "But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

So Jesus said, "If you believed Moses, you would have believed me." Then He ended the conversation with these words in verse 47, "But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" It boils down to this...

C. If the unbeliever won't believe Moses, he won't believe Jesus (47). To borrow from Barclay, "The point is not: 'Am I as good as my neighbor?' The point is: 'Am I as good as God?' 'What do I look like to him?'" So long as we judge ourselves by human comparisons there is plenty of room for self-satisfaction, and that kills faith, for faith is born of the sense of need."¹²

Do you want to know what you look like to God? Then read Moses. And once you see your sinful self, run to Jesus.

It's worth noting that right after the controversial miracle Jesus did in John 5, He's once again in trouble with the Pharisees. Do you know why? Check out a harmony of the Gospels and you'll see that the very next event following John 5 is a story recorded in the parallel accounts of Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5. It's the story of the Pharisees confronting Jesus because His disciples picked and ate grain...*on the Sabbath.*

They didn't get it, did they? They saw the words that Moses wrote, but they didn't believe him, for if they had they would have believed in the One He wrote about.

Implications: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *In what are you trusting?* Yourself? Your own goodness? What some person says or thinks? Or are you trusting in Christ?

2. *For whom are you living?* It's the glory question. Do you have the love of God in your heart? Is life about you or Him, your agenda or His, your honor or His, your fame or His? Look back at the past week, or month, or year. For whom are you living?

3. *Whose praise matters most to you?* Is it the temporary applause of this world, or the eternal commendation of the One whose opinion matters most?

¹¹ John 12:41 says, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him."

¹² Barclay, pp. 199-200.