

“The Witness of Scripture”

September 29, 2013

Text: John 5:39-40

In last Sunday’s text, Jesus gave 3 reasons why people should believe His testimony that He is God, the Son of God=>

- * His testimony can save our souls
- * His testimony is really the Father’s testimony about Him
- * Rejecting His testimony means rejecting Scripture.

Today’s text tells us that the Jewish religious leaders to whom Jesus had been talking in John 5 did not believe He was God’s Son—i.e., they didn’t believe in His deity.

Their not believing in X, as the Son of God, despite all the evidence He had given them to the contrary, represented a spiritual failure on their part.

1st, it was a failure to believe what Scripture had prophesied regarding the coming Messiah.

2nd, it was a failure of their will.

By a perverse act of will, they had chosen not to believe in Jesus as God’s Son, even though believing held out of promise of eternal life.

To quote Jesus’ own words=> *“You are **unwilling** to come to Me so that you may have life.”*

As you might suspect, this verse is one that our Arminian brothers camp on, to prove that man has free will.

They claim it teaches that people become born again by using their free will to believe in X, & to come to Him.

As Calvinists, we answer that man’s will really isn’t free.

His will is shaped/governed by his minds' understanding.

But his mind was fatally damaged by Adam's fall into sin.

Rom 3 says=> "*There is none who **understands**, [w/ the mind] There is none who seeks for God*" (3:11).

Adam sought for God in the cool of the day until he sinned.

But from then on, he not only stopped seeking God, he actually tried to hide from God, & his descendants have been hiding from God ever since.

Do you wonder why the unsaved loved-ones for whom you constantly pray have no desire to come to X, rid themselves of the moral misery in their lives, & reach out to Him for salvation which brings joy & eternal life to the soul?

(the most wonderful/delightful gift imaginable)?

It's because they can't understand these spiritual truths, & not understanding them, they have no incentive to use their will in order to act on them.

They have no desire to seek forgiveness of their sins from Jesus, because they neither understand nor believe that they are sinners, & He is the Savior/Son-of-God.

Man's will is powerfully impacted by all his faculties which were devastated by Adam's sin—his mind, conscience, imagination, spirit/flesh—not to mention his will itself.

I.e., his whole nature was spiritually/morally damaged.

As a result, Scripture describes man's nature like this=>

"All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not

even one. / Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; / Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; / Their feet are swift to shed blood, / Destruction and misery are in their paths, / And the path of peace they have not known. / There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:12-18).

If you are a Protestant rather than a Catholic, you owe your Protestantism (at least in part) to Martin Luther.

And this is what Luther believed about free will=>

“If any man does ascribe anything of salvation, even the very least, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of divine grace, and he has not learnt Jesus Christ aright.”

Someone=> “I read those words in Scripture about the poison of asps under man’s lips, & mouths full of cursing and bitterness, & I just don’t think my heart is really that bad.

“So I don’t think I really need a Savior from sin as much as some other people do.”

There are 2 reasons why such a person thinks that way=>

#1. Because he is judging himself by a false standard=> other people’s “righteousness.”

By that standard, most of us look pretty good.

But the true standard, by which God Himself judges us all, is His own holiness/righteousness.

And on that basis, Isa 64:6 says=> “*All of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.*”

In God's eyes, our very best is vile corruption.

#2. II Cor 4 explains that *"the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"* (4:4).

The beautiful/brilliant glory of X's Gospel can't be seen by most people, because Satan has blinded them to their own sin, & their need to be saved. That was certainly the case w/ the religious leaders to whom Jesus was talking in John 5.

In today's text, Jesus will expose 2 failures which kept the Jewish religious leaders from believing in Him=> misuse of Scripture, & misuse of their will.

*** Misuse of Scripture**

[John 5:39]=> *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;"*

Israel's religious leaders had misused Scripture by treating it as a means of attaining eternal life—apart from God.

Jesus said, *"You search the Scriptures,"* & the word He chose meant they thoroughly/meticulously studied it.

Theirs wasn't a failure based on negligence of God's Word.

They'd gone to great lengths to study/learn it.

But they treated Scripture almost as if merely reading it could magically give a person eternal life.

The famous rabbi Hillel said=>

"The more study of the law, the more life"; "If a man gains for

himself words of the law, he has gained life in the world to come.”

Commendably, the Jews did read/study/memorize Scripture,

taking a very serious view of it, as God’s revealed Word.

In that sense, they were like many of us.

You prob. came to this church today because you wanted to hear

& learn God’s Word.

Not because you expected a great rock-band to play as we

sang—we don’t have such a band.

The religious leaders in our text shared that same serious

interest in Scripture which you feel.

But the Jewish leaders’ misuse of Scripture involved their treating it merely as an instruction book on how to get into the Kingdom of God.

They were like some other folks we meet in the Gospels=>

* E.g. Nicodemus, to whom Jesus said=> *“Truly, truly, I say*

to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3).

That’s what Nicodemus had come to ask X about=>

What is the secret to getting into God’s Kingdom?

* When a rich young ruler came to our Lord in Matt 19,

the question on his mind had to do with gaining

eternal life—same basic issue, stated differently=>

“Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” (Mt 19:16).

* In Lk 10, a lawyer came asking the same question=>

“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

(Lk 10:25).

In each of these cases, the person had sought to learn from Scripture how to gain eternal life.

Having exhausted those efforts, & feeling he still hadn't discovered the key, he came to Jesus for the answer.

This approach was a misuse of Scripture because God never intended for man to attain eternal life apart from a relationship w/ Him, based on faith.

In Jn 17, Jesus will define the nature of eternal life in His prayer:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn 17:3).

Eternal life is not just glorious/everlasting life in heaven.

It is a close/personal relationship w/ Jesus, through which a person comes to know God, catapulting him into a whole new sphere of life.

Scripture testifies to man about Jesus, so that man can enter into such a relationship, & gain eternal life.

There is no way to go around Jesus in order obtain eternal life w/o Him.

Trying to do so just shows that a man doesn't understand its nature, has an insulting lack of love for the Lord, and feels no desire for a relationship w/ Him.

The Jews in our text misused Scripture in 3 basic ways=>

* They never sought to embrace its core spiritual values, but instead, fixated on a surface understanding of its words.

*E.g. Jesus told them in Mt 5:21f, “*You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ / But I say to you that everyone who is **angry** with his brother shall be guilty before the court.*”

The sin of murder goes deeper than the actual act & includes even the malicious attitudes behind it.

The Lord was after a change in their hearts, but they kept assuming He would accept a superficial change in behavior instead of that, & leave their hearts alone.

He was showing them that only He could bring about the necessary transformation in heart attitude, & that He would do so, if they’d just love-Him/trust-Him.

Scripture was intended to show man His need for God, but the Jewish leaders kept trying to teach people how to master its principles by themselves, so they wouldn’t need God’s help in meeting His moral standards.

* The 2nd way most Jews misused Scripture was that they didn’t allow it to impact them at the very core of their being.

In Psa 119, the Psalmist wrote=> “*I will **meditate** on Your precepts And regard Your ways. / I shall **delight** in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word*” (119:15f).

The Jewish believer was to take in God’s Word, meditate on it, & assimilate it into his being, until it changed the way he thought/felt, a/w/a the things he delighted in (on the one hand) and abhorred (on the other).

We too are to meditate on the Word, asking the Lord to use it to change our hearts, through the power of the H.S. It's good to learn the facts of Scripture, but not merely to intellectualize it—rather to assimilate it into our hearts, until it changes our character, our personality, & our relationships w/ God/man.

Our task is not simply to get it into our brains, so that we can master it—but to get it into our hearts, so that it can master us.

Until it makes us nicer people, & our minds are warmed w/ real love for our Lord & for people.

* 3rd, the Jews misused Scripture by not seeking truth about God Himself in it, in order to love Him wholeheartedly.

In Psa 119:10, a faithful believer who does so prays this=>

*“With all my heart I have **sought You.**”*

If the Jewish leaders to whom Jesus was talking had truly done that, they would have recognized God's own character in His Son—Jesus X.

We too are to seek our Lord in His Word, feasting on its truths about His goodness/glory, learning to love Him w/ our whole heart/soul/mind/being.

Someone: I don't meditate on the Bible because it bores me.

It shouldn't bore you, because it deals w/ all the most critical issues of the life— love/hatred, life/death, heaven/hell.

Part of my job is to help you discover/understand/believe that
God's Word is the most exciting/truthful/trustworthy book
in the world.

After Jesus' death/resurrection, He met 2 people on the road to a
town called Emmaus.

As they walked along together, He took them thru a survey
of the OT, explaining how it all related to His own
life/death.

When He had left them, they said to one another=>

*"Were not our **hearts burning** within us while He
was speaking to us on the road, while He was
explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32).*

I've had occasion when my heart burned as Scripture was
explained to me.

I hope you have too—there's nothing like it in this world.

* **Misuse of the Will** (the Jewish religious leaders' other failure)

[Verse 40]=> *"and you are **unwilling** to come to Me so that you
may have life."*

The lit. wording=> *"You do not will to come toward Me."*

This is the ultimate misuse of the human will.

Man was created w/ sufficient freedom of will to reject God.

That decision ultimately condemns his sinful soul.

Q: What about God's sovereign election/predestination/calling?

That's true too.

E.g. in Jn 6:44, Jesus says=> *"**No one can come to Me**
unless the Father who sent Me **draws him; and I will**
raise him up on the last day."*

Whom does God draw to X—His elect.

So does that nullify the effect of man's will?

Not at all, as proven by Jesus' words in our text=>

*“you are **unwilling** to come to Me.”*

In Jn 8:44, Jesus says to some antagonistic nonbelievers=>

*“You are of your father the devil, and you **want** to do the **desires** of your father.”*

Their sin was found in their own evil desires—their will—
just as the sin of the men in our own text was that
they did not will/desire to come to X, to have life.

Human will does play an important role in our salvation.

X said=> *“If anyone is **willing** to do His [God's] will,
he will know of the teaching, whether it is of
God or whether I speak from Myself” (Jn 7:17).*

How to match up God's sovereign election w/ man's

responsibility to obey God in an act of his free moral
agency, is a mystery we don't yet understand.

But to shortchange either truth, is theological error.

Why do people live as enemies of God, & die unsaved?

- * It's not because God has decreed/elected them to do that.
- * It's not because the atoning power of X's death is only
sufficient to cover the sins of some people—not all.
- * It's not because God doesn't care whether they spend
eternity in heaven or hell.

II Pet 3 says He does not wish for any to perish, but
for all to come to repentance (3:9).

Not only does God want them to come to X, He has
commanded them to repent/believe in Him.

* It's not because Jesus doesn't care about their souls.

He said to the lost people of His own time=> "*How
often I wanted to gather your children together,
the way a hen gathers her chicks under her
wings, & you were **unwilling***" (Mt 23:37).

So then why do people live/die as God's enemies, and thus
spend all of eternity in hell, suffering death w/o life?
Because they do not will to come to Jesus for life, but
choose eternal death for themselves instead.

If a person becomes born again, it is all of God, because he's
saved by grace thru faith, not of himself, leaving him
absolutely nothing about which to boast.

On the other hand, if a person is eternally lost, it is entirely
of himself, because he did not will to come to X.

Why anyone do that is explained in Jn 3:19=> "*Light has
come into the world, & men **loved the darkness**
rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.*"

Left to himself, man always chooses death/darkness.

Someone=> I just can't believe anyone is either that wicked or
that foolish.

Then you don't believe what X has said in our text.

And you also don't believe the words of Scripture.

So I would ask you on what basis do you choose to reject them,
& how you know which words of X/Scripture to reject?

What *do* you believe, & why do you believe it?

What is the final authority by which you decide what to believe? Your own subjective opinion?

There are a number of specific reasons why sinners refuse to come to Jesus for eternal life, including these=>

* 1st, they don't think they need X, because they don't sense their own sinfulness, or their spiritual lostness in sin.

They don't feel their souls' need to be washed in X's blood.

And they don't feel a need for God's grace to purify them.

Until the H.S. opens a person's eyes to his own sinfulness,

X will be an option for him—but not a necessity.

But if the Spirit opens his spiritual eyes, he'll say w/ Psa 51

“My iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. / My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. / I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. / For my loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my flesh. / I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart” (51:4-8).

* 2nd, sinners don't like Jesus' way of saving them.

They'd gladly be saved from hell, but not from sin.

They don't want to be holy, because they love their sin.

Not being able to swear, get drunk, or entertain lustful

thoughts has no appeal for them at all.

* 3rd, sinners loath the thought of the humbling themselves before

X, seeking a gracious gift of life which they don't deserve.

If they could feel they've contributed just a little to their own salvation by some admirable religious act, thus preserving their pride, that would be more gratifying. The gate into the heaven is too low for the proud sinner to be able to hold his head high as he goes through it. Jesus makes the sinner stoop, & that goes against the grain. So when sinners hear that it's all of X or none of X, they tend to turn on their heels, & walk away frustrated. They say to the Lord, "I will not come to You that I might have life—You require too much."

4th, sinners do not come to Jesus for eternal life, because they don't recognize His sinless/priceless/majestic worth.

The Jewish leaders in our text certainly didn't.

For any/all of these reasons, the natural man, in his love for his sin, will not come to Jesus, that he might have life.

We might beg/plead him, w/ tears in our eyes but he won't come.

We might sit next to him on his deathbed, vividly portraying the horrors of Hell he'll face in minutes, & the joys/glories of heaven that could be his if he'd believe, but he won't do it.

We could assure him that, no matter how grievous his sin is, the grace of God, & the love of X, is sufficient to cover it all.

But he would not believe in Jesus—and neither would you/I—unless the H.S. intervened to draw us to Him as our Savior.

Jesus told the Jewish leaders "*you are unwilling to come to Me.*"

But the truth is, so were we, until the Spirit drew us.

The good news in all this is that we did come to X if/when we were irresistibly drawn by the Spirit, & if we did, we used our will to reach out to Him in faith.

And there we discovered the joy of life—real/eternal life.

We gained life in a *legal* sense, whereas before we were under a sentence of death/condemnation because of our sin.

God had told Adam that, in the day he ate from the tree, he would “*surely die*” (not physically, but legally).

Romans 5 says that when Adam sinned, we sinned in him.

But, if we have come to Jesus, & trusted in Him, we have been acquitted because of what He did on the cross.

We also gained *spiritual* life, being made spiritually alive in X.

Before, we were spiritually “*dead in our trespasses & sins*” & always had been (Eph 2:1).

God’s Word was meaningless to us, spiritual truth meant nothing to us, & we were blissfully ignorant of sin.

We may have read the Bible, & sat through sermons w/o number, but it all had no effect on us whatever.

Then suddenly one day, that all changed, as the Spirit opened our spiritual ears, & truth entered our heart.

We believed in X, came to life spiritually, & we knew it.

Finally, we gained *eternal* life in X.

Unlike Jewish leaders, we came in Him, & He gave us life.

X said (Jn 10:27f)—“*My sheep hear My voice & I know them, & they follow Me; / & I give **eternal life** to them.*”

That’s what Jesus did for those of us who believed in Him.

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Text: John 5:39-40

1. Man’s will is shaped and governed by his minds’ understanding; but his mind was fatally damaged by Adam’s [10 fall] into sin.

Rom 3:11, 12-18

Someone: “I don’t think my heart is really bad.” There are two reasons why a person thinks that way...

- *2. Because he is judging himself by a false standard: [12 other] people’s “righteousness.”

Isa 64:6; II Cor 4:4

- *3. The beautiful, brilliant glory of Christ’s Gospel cannot be seen by most people because Satan has [16 blinded] them to it and to their own sin.

In today’s text Jesus will expose two failures which kept the Jewish religious leaders from believing in Him...

*** Misuse of Scripture**

[John 5:39]

4. The Jewish leaders’ misuse of Scripture involved their treating it merely as an instruction book on how to get into the [16 Kingdom] of God.

Jn 3:3; Mt 19:16; Lk 10:25; Jn 17:3

The Jews in our text misused Scripture in three basic ways...

- *5. They never sought to embrace its core [20 spiritual] values.

Mt 5:21-22

- *6. They didn’t allow it to impact them at the very [10 core] of their being.

Psa 119:15-16

- *7. They didn’t seek truth about God Himself in it in order to [10 love] Him wholeheartedly.

Psa 119:10; Lk 24:32

*** Misuse of the Will**

[Verse 40]

8. Man was created with sufficient freedom of will to [14 reject] God.

Jn 6:44; 8:44; 7:17

9. How to match up God's sovereign election with man's responsibility to obey God in an act of his free moral agency, is a [16 mystery] we don't yet understand.

II Pet 3:9; Mt 23:37

10. If a person becomes born again, it is all of God; if a person is eternally lost, it is entirely of [16 himself].

Jn 3:19

There are a number of specific reasons why sinners refuse to come to Jesus for eternal life...

*11. They don't think they [10 need] Christ.

Psa 51:4-8

*12. Sinners don't like Jesus' [8 way] of saving them.

*13. Sinners loath the thought of the [18 humbling] themselves before Christ.

*14. Sinners do not come to Jesus because they don't recognize His sinless, priceless, majestic [12 worth].

If and when we were irresistibly drawn by the Spirit and we used our will to reach out to Christ in faith...

*15. we gained life in a [12 legal] sense;

*16. we also gained [18 spiritual] life;

Eph 2:1

*17. we gained [16 eternal] life in Christ.

Jn 10:27-28