

Chapter 21: The Works of Jesus

John 10:22–42

There is a faith that perpetually seeks the next thrill. As long as the mountain-top experience continues, this faith is willing to continue forward. The moment, however, that this faith falls from the mountain-top experience down into the valley of the shadow of death, this faith refuses to continue following the Good Shepherd—or even to seek the Shepherd’s presence and comfort there in the darkness (Ps. 23:4). Instead, this faith moves on to someone or something else, hoping that the next thrill will offer more and longer-lasting pleasure. This *false* faith, then, is chiefly attracted to extraordinary, impressive *works*, and John has already warned us to be on the lookout for it in his Gospel (John 2:23–25, 4:43–48, 6:2, 26), for that false faith will vanish as soon as following Jesus becomes hard (John 6:60–66).

This false, works-seeking faith, however, is not our only spiritual danger. There is also a blind, deaf faith that remains so dogmatically self-assured that it refuses to believe, even when confronted with Jesus’ extraordinary works. It is not that there is *no* faith, because in fact this is a very *strong* faith—strong enough to ignore the clearest proofs. This is a blind faith because it cannot see the Light of the world (John 9:39, 41), and it is a deaf faith because it cannot hear the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10:25–26). Jesus is not unreasonable; when he preaches and teaches about himself, his mission, and his relationship to the Father, he does not ask us merely to make an irrational leap of faith to believe his word. To help us believe, Jesus provides many works that prove his claims. Nevertheless, when faith is blind, it cannot truly see the works for what they are, and when faith is deaf, it cannot truly hear the words that Jesus speaks to explain them. In John 10:22–42, Jesus confronts this false faith by arguing that even if people cannot believe his *word*, they should believe on the basis of his *works* (John 10:38), for *the works of Jesus corroborate, validate, and authenticate the word of Jesus*.

The Works Corroborate the Word (John 10:22–29)

The last time John clearly marked the time was in John 7:2, when the Feast of Booths (September/October) was at hand. Now, John tells us that the Feast of Dedication is taking place in Jerusalem (John 10:22). Since this feast falls in December, during the winter (John 10:22), Jesus is likely in the sheltered colonnade of Solomon (John 10:23) to avoid the cold weather.¹ The Feast of Dedication (more commonly known today as *Hanukkah*) remembered the dark days of the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes, who had defiled Israel’s temple by offering sacrifices to the pagan god Zeus there in 167 BC. In response, Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt, drove out the Greeks, and cleansed the temple to restore it to the true worship of Yahweh in 164 BC. The Feast of Dedication commemorates the rededication of the temple after its desecration.² With the theme of national deliverance as the backdrop to this feast, it becomes all the more ironic that Jesus, “the promised Messiah, Israel’s deliverer, would face rejection at [this] festival.”³ Still, John may mention Solomon’s

colonnade as the location for this conversation because later on “the first believers, after the resurrection, would regularly gather [there] to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 3:11; 5:12).”

Suddenly, the Jews surround Jesus to ask him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). By this time, Jesus has already stated much about himself, but, outside of revealing himself as the Christ privately to the Samaritan woman (John 4:26), he has not explicitly claimed to be the Christ in public: “His claims to being the source of living water (7:37–38), Light for the world (8:12), the Shepherd of the sheep (10:11) were certainly astonishing, but was he prepared to affirm that he was *the Anointed of God*, and so the King of the coming Kingdom of God? That was the crucial matter.”⁵ In that day, the title “Christ” (a Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah,” meaning “Anointed One”) carried “too many political and military connotations” for Jesus to use the term in a way that could clearly communicate his mission (cf. John 5:15).⁶ It is *true* that Jesus is the Christ, but the people mistakenly believed that the “Christ” would be a deliverer like Judas Maccabaeus, coming to lead another military revolt against their oppressors—this time, not against the Greeks but the Romans. We see Jesus exercising the same kind of secrecy about his identity as the Christ in the other Gospels, and biblical scholars commonly speak of the “Messianic Secret” in the Gospel of Mark, since Jesus regularly insists there that no one speak of who he is, or what he has done for them (Mk. 8:30 par.; cf. Mk. 1:34; 5:43; 7:36; 9:9).⁷

The Jews are asking Jesus whether he can actually do all that he has been preaching. He has made extraordinary claims, but is he really the Christ who will lead them out of bondage? It is one thing to talk a big game in the way that Jesus has done, but can he back it up by executing the office of the Christ? They are asking Jesus about his *identity*, but they really want to know about his *works*. Will Jesus do everything that the Scriptures prophesy that the Christ will do? Or, more accurately, will Jesus actually do everything that they *think* the Scriptures prophesy that the Christ will do?

Jesus' Word and Works

Jesus does not answer their question directly. Instead, he says, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep” (John 10:25–26). Instead of saying “I am the Christ” in so many words, Jesus instead points to two sources of evidence that reveal that he is the Christ: his word and his works. By his word, Jesus has already “told” them that he is the Christ: “for those with eyes to see (John informs his readers), so deft had been Jesus’ self-references, his use of the Old Testament, his handling of titles, his discussions of the relation between God and himself, that he has virtually pointed himself out as the Messiah.”⁸

Then, by his works, Jesus has demonstrated his superiority over the Jewish purification rites (John 2:1–11), his role as the new Moses by feeding Israelites in the wilderness (John 6:1–14), his lordship over creation by walking on the sea (John 6:16–21), and his ability to heal—even at a distance (John 4:46–54), even for a 38-year-old ailment (John 5:1–9), and even in the case of a man born blind (John 9:1–7). Everything that Jesus has done has built his résumé as the Messiah, but because Jesus has not begun a rebellion against the Romans (like Judas Maccabaeus did with the Greeks), Jesus’ other works do not register to them as Messianic. They hear his word, but their deaf faith cannot truly listen (John 10:25); they witness Jesus’ signs, but their blind faith cannot truly see (John 10:26). If they wish to know whether Jesus is the Christ, they do not need more testimony or more evidence; they only need to believe in the ample words and works that Jesus has already given

them.

The Faith of Jesus' Sheep

The Jews do not know whether Jesus is the Christ because they do not believe, and Jesus further explains that they do not believe because they “are not among my sheep” (John 10:26b). Here, Jesus both returns to and expands upon the basic themes of the Good Shepherd discourse from earlier in this chapter: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28). There are two ways to *hear* Jesus' word: externally and internally.⁹ The Jews have all heard Jesus *externally* by hearing him teach, preach, and answer their questions and accusations. Nevertheless, they do not hear Jesus *internally* by the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit who attunes them so they may truly *listen* to Jesus as sheep would listen to their shepherd. Their only hope is that the Spirit of God might grant them new birth (John 3:3–8), for only those who are born of the Spirit can see the kingdom of God (John 3:3), and only those who are the sheep of Jesus can hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ the King (John 10:27).

Still, this does not mean that unbelief is *God's* fault, for *we* are responsible for our unbelief. Jesus' point is not to cast us into a passive fatalism where we sit around and wait to find out whether we are one of the sheep or not. Not at all! Jesus gives us this doctrine for two reasons. First, Jesus here gives us confidence that hard hearts *can* be changed by the power of the gospel, as well as consolation when hard hearts are *not* changed yet.¹⁰ It is demoralizing when we fail to see gospel fruit among those for whom we labor in prayer, word, and service, so it is encouraging to remember that hard-hearted sinners even rejected Jesus himself. Second, Jesus continues to hold out the invitation to believe.¹¹ The reason that Jesus does not work to manipulate these people into faith *and* the reason that he does not close the possibility of faith is the same: Jesus knows that no matter what he says, the unregenerate will never believe, but the regenerate will never *fail* to believe. He does not need to manipulate, browbeat, or flatter them, for his sheep do not need such forms of coercion, and those who are not his sheep will not be moved by them.

This is why the church must preach, teach, and counsel exclusively from God's word. For those who are truly Jesus' sheep, they will respond to nothing else so well as to the voice of their Shepherd. They will listen to that voice, and they will follow what that voice tells them to do. More than that, if we speak to them with a different voice than what Jesus speaks in his word, our ministry will not only be less effective, but we will cause the sheep to flee, for we will be speaking with the voice of a stranger (John 10:5). Our ministry is not about building personal followings around ourselves, but about declaring and ministering the word of *Jesus* to his sheep. As the great Protestant Reformer Martin Bucer wrote:

The Church is born through the word; not through the word of the outward sermon or Scripture alone, but through the living word which God speaks in the heart. This does not sound differently from the outward word, indeed, it is one and the same word, except that God has made it live in the heart.¹²

Through the *outward* word of the Scriptures read and preached, the Good Shepherd speaks *inwardly* to his sheep by the Holy Spirit, leading and guiding them.

The Shepherd's Eternal Life

Jesus already stated in John 10:1–18 what he repeats in John 10:27: the sheep *hear* the Shepherd's voice (cf. John 10:3, 4, 16), the Shepherd *knows* his sheep (John 10:3, 14), and the sheep *follow* the Shepherd (John 10:3, 4, 16). After restating those principles, Jesus then takes this extended metaphor about the Good Shepherd and his sheep one step further: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28–29). Where the ultimate *expression* of the Shepherd's love for his sheep comes when he lays down his life for them (John 10:11, 15, 17–18), the ultimate *fruition* of the Shepherd's love comes when he gives them eternal life. By "eternal life," Jesus means an altogether different *quality* of life that he himself possesses as God (John 1:4), but also an unlimited *quantity* of that life, so that his sheep "will never perish."¹³ The eternal life that Jesus gives to his sheep will last forever!

Not only can this eternal life never perish, but it can also never be *stolen* away. No one can ever snatch Jesus' sheep out of his hand—that is, out of Jesus' *power*, which is "all-sufficient to protect every believer forever....However weak the sheep are, under Jesus they are perfectly safe."¹⁴ Neither the wolf (John 10:12), nor the thieves and robbers (John 10:1, 8), nor the stranger (John 10:5) can snatch the sheep away.¹⁵ Furthermore, because Jesus is the Good Shepherd and not a hired hand (John 10:12–13), there will never be a moment when Jesus will shrink back from protecting his sheep from a threat or giving his absolute diligence to his work of shepherding. We are never so safe and secure as when we are kept safe in the hand of Jesus.

It is not only Jesus, however, who keeps us safe. We rest securely in the hand of Jesus because the Father, who is greater than all, *gives* us to Jesus (John 10:29). This does not mean that we have been transferred *out* of the protection of the Father to Jesus, but that the Father gives us to Jesus *in* his protection. Ultimately, we cannot be safe unless the Good Shepherd lays down his life for us by going to the cross to die for our sins, and we cannot experience safety in the presence of the Father unless we approach him through our justifying union with Jesus (John 10:14–15). The question is not whether the Father or the Son offers better security to us, but rather how the Father keeps us safe *in* his Son.

Listen to the Word!

Jesus begins his (indirect) answer to the question of whether he is the Christ by emphasizing the way his works corroborate his word. Everything he has told them is true, and the works that he does in his Father's name bear witness about him. They are looking for a Christ in the mold of Judas Maccabaeus, who might lead them out from under Roman oppression, but he has come to be the Christ in a far superior sense: he has come to give his people eternal life. He will turn his attention to the importance of his works momentarily, but here his main reason for pointing to his works is to show that all his signs and miracles point to the same reality that he has testified to in his word. Therefore, if his accusers would truly listen to his word, they would recognize that his works corroborate everything he has spoken.

Therefore, listen to the word! When you read the Bible, listen to a sermon, participate in a Bible study, or study a commentary on the Bible, your goal is never merely to come to an intellectual, external understanding of what you are hearing. Instead, when you listen to the word, Jesus the

Good Shepherd is leading you through the Holy Spirit to consider and understand *him* in his person and in his work, so that you can respond by following him in faith. He wants you to listen to him *internally*, in your heart, and he accomplishes this work through your listening to his *external* word in the Scriptures, preaching, and the sacraments. If you want to know your Good Shepherd, listen to his word!

The Works Validate the Word (John 10:30–36)

In John 10:30, Jesus brings what he has said about the eternal security of his sheep to its logical conclusion by answering an unspoken question: How is it possible that we are *both* in the Father’s hand *and* in Jesus’ hand, if the Father has given us to Jesus? Jesus explains, “I and the Father are one.” More literally, the text reads, “I and the Father, we are one.”¹⁶ Now, Jesus has already spoken of his union with the Father in this chapter: “the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:15). There, Jesus was not speaking of a passing acquaintance between him and the Father, but of an infinite, eternal intimacy between the Father and the Son. Here, Jesus takes that language a step further by saying that he and his Father are, in fact, one. When the Jews hear him say this, they immediately pick up stones to stone him (John 10:31). Jesus will soon explain how their understanding of and response to what he has said is mistaken (John 10:32–36); however, the fact remains that if what Jesus says is false, there is no question that he has uttered blasphemy and stands condemned to death by stoning, according to the law. Still, what has Jesus actually said here?

Union with the Father

There are two components of this short verse that must shape our interpretation of it. First, Jesus does not say that he and the Father are the same *person*. If Jesus had meant to say that he and the Father were identical in their personhood, then he would have used the masculine form of the word one (*hein*) instead of the neuter form (*hen*) which he uses here. Very roughly translated, if Jesus had used the masculine form, he would be saying, “I and the Father are one *person*,” but with the neuter form, he means, “I and the Father are one *thing*” or, better, “I and the Father are one *entity*.”¹⁷ Second, the literal translation of this verse demonstrates that Jesus speaks of him and his Father as *we*, not as *I*. That is, he does not say, “I and the Father—I *am* one” but “I and the Father, *we are* one.” The Father and the Son are two *persons* who are united as one *entity*.

These observations help protect us from two ancient heresies.¹⁸ The first heresy, called modalism or Sabellianism, holds that God is one person who manifests himself in different *modes*, or by wearing different *masks*, at different points in history—as the Father during the Old Testament, as Jesus during our Lord’s earthly ministry, and then as the Holy Spirit after Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension. If the Father and the Son are *two* persons (“*we are*”), then modalism falsely portrays the relationship of the Father to the Son by confusing the persons. The second heresy, called Arianism, holds that the Son is not fully God in the way that the Father is, but merely the highest being in creation, the first whom the Father created. The unity Jesus projects with the Father—going so far as to say that he is *one* (“one thing, one being, one God, one Lord”; Martin Luther)¹⁹ with the Father—would indeed be blasphemous if the eternal Son of the Father had not uttered it.

In context, this phrase is not quite a proof-text for saying that the Son is of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father as one God, since Jesus is not primarily talking about his unity in *essence*

with the Father, but about his unity in the Father's *works*.²⁰ Nevertheless, Jesus elsewhere cites his doing the works of the Father as proof that he is equal with the Father (John 5:17–19). Furthermore, Jesus is clearly echoing Israel's great confession of monotheism from Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."²¹ There is only *one* God, and Jesus is one God *with* him. If this text doesn't prove on the surface that Jesus shares a fully divine nature with the Father, then the deeper implications of the text certainly do.

Validating Works

The Jews should have put Jesus through a formal trial before moving to kill him by stoning, and the Romans did not allow the Jews to execute criminals on their own (John 18:31); however, the Jews believed that Jesus had clearly blasphemed, so they do not wait for procedural niceties to be observed before moving to stone him (John 10:31).²² Jesus stops them in their tracks, though, by asking them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" (John 10:32). Jesus is forcing his enemies to reconcile the fact that Jesus has done truly noble and beautiful (*kalos*) works.²³ This was the issue at the heart of the trial of the man who was born blind: why would God use a sinner or a demoniac to perform the extraordinary miracle of opening the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:16, 30–33; 10:21)? On the other hand, if Jesus *has* performed such good works, is it possible that he has not blasphemed, but is telling the truth? More than that, if he is indeed performing these signs because he comes *from the Father*, then would they not be persecuting the Father's own servant by stoning him?²⁴

The Jews try to draw a hard distinction between Jesus' words and works: "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:33). This response, however, misses the point that Jesus was making. Jesus has repeatedly proven that he comes "from the Father" by the works that he does. Jesus' words and his works stand together, so that the words interpret the works, and the works validate the words. Either he comes from the Father or he doesn't, and if the works prove that he *does* come from the Father, then his words must be taken seriously in light of what his works prove.

Validating Words

Because the Jews do not believe the works that Jesus performs, Jesus defends his words with *other* words—the words of the Law: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" Jesus here offers a complicated interpretation of a complicated text. What did God mean when he addresses some as "gods" in Psalm 82? There are three basic possibilities that Bible interpreters have offered: (1) the gods are Israel's judges who have been entrusted with God's own authority to judge (cf. Dt. 1:17; John 5:22–23, 27, 30; 8:16); (2) the gods are angelic power with authority over the nations; or (3) the gods are the Israelites when they receive God's law ("to whom the word of God came": John 10:35) on Mount Sinai.²⁵

Jesus' point, though, is not dependent on any single interpretation of Psalm 82:6, but on the mere fact that there are legitimate reasons for speaking of *gods* aside from the one true God. Jesus is not interested in exegeting the passage, but in citing Scripture (which cannot be broken; John 10:35) to shatter their rigid charges of blasphemy. Unless the Jews are ready to say that God himself is

blaspheming in the Scriptures (which is impossible) by calling some *gods*, then they should perhaps slow down their haste in picking up stones to kill Jesus. Moreover, Jesus returns to the idea that he is from the Father by describing himself as the one “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (John 10:36). Jesus is in a category by himself, a category that they do not understand—should they therefore be stoning someone whom they do not understand? Jesus is not saying that he is a god like the gods of Psalm 82:6, but something like this: “If in any sense the Psalm may apply this term to men, then much more may it be applied to him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world.”²⁶ D. A. Carson writes:

In the heat of their opposition to what they hear Jesus to be saying, they are partly right (he does make himself equal with God), partly wrong (this fact does not establish a competing God), and profoundly mistaken (they have not grasped the drift of their own Scriptures to see how he fulfils them, nor have they known God well enough to perceive that the revelation he is and brings is in continuity with and the capstone of the revelation of God already provided. The stated context—mob humours heated to the threshold of explosive violence—does not provide him with the leisure for cool theological dialogue. So he administers a short, sharp shock, a *scriptural* reason why they should not take umbrage just because he calls himself the Son of God. That reason does not establish the nature of his unique sonship: that is presupposed, rather, by his self-reference as *the one whom the Father set apart...and sent into the world*. But the *ad hominem* rebuke stalls the crowd long enough for him to appeal once more to the testimony of his words and works.²⁷

To claim to be one with the Father is not blasphemy for Jesus; it is the truth.

Believe the Word!

It is one thing to trust a person, and another thing to trust that person’s word. Certainly, if you do not trust a person, you will also not trust his word; however, there are times when you may believe that a person is trustworthy, but that he is mistaken or blinded in some way. In such cases, you must not trust his word, and, depending on the severity of what that person is telling you, you may need to go to great lengths to stop the person from doing something that may harm himself or someone else. It is possible that some of the Jews see Jesus in this way, as an insightful teacher who has nevertheless crossed a serious boundary by claiming to be one with the Father. The law is clear: a blasphemer must be stoned to death.

But this is where Jesus leads us beyond the necessity of simply *listening* to him to the requirement of *believing* him. Through the course of our lives, Jesus will speak things to us that we find challenging, confusing, painful, and even offensive. In those cases, it is possible to rationalize unbelief in our hearts by saying, “I believe in Jesus; however, he is clearly flawed in this area—too strict, or too gracious. Therefore, I will do what I believe to be right rather than following him in what *he* says is right.” Jesus, however, insists that we not only listen to his word, but that we *believe* his word, in the recognition that his ways and thoughts are higher than ours. When our understanding conflicts with Jesus’ word, the problem lies not in Jesus but in us. Will we trust him even when his word is hard?

The Works Authenticate the Word (John 10:37–42)

Jesus seems to recognize the difficulty of believing him, so he cuts through the confusion with a simple test: “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:37–38). The most objective way to evaluate whether Jesus is from the Father is by looking at his works. If he is not doing the works of his Father, then you may dismiss him. But since Jesus *is* doing the works of the Father, even if they do not want to believe Jesus, why wouldn’t they believe the works themselves? The reason, of course, is that their hearts are hard with a blind, deaf faith that refuses to acknowledge all that Jesus has done before their eyes.

The Father in me; I in the Father

Emerging from this summary of the meaning of his works is another step forward in Jesus’ self-revelation of his relationship to the Father: “that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” The words “know” and “understand” come from the same verb in Greek put into different tenses. The first tense carries the idea of the beginning of knowledge (“come to realize”), while the second idea communicates the ongoing experience of that knowledge into the future (“go on realizing”).²⁸ They do not understand what he has taught them, so Jesus wants them to learn that he comes from the Father; however, his relationship with the Father is so significant that this is not a one-time lesson, but something that they will continue in their enjoyment of pondering the Father’s relationship to the Son throughout eternity, if they will only believe now!

This relationship is characterized by the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son. We cannot understand the relationship between the Father and the Son as though the Father were the ventriloquist, and Jesus the puppet, since in the exact same way that the Father is in the Son, so also the Son is in the Father.²⁹ In classic Christian theology, this doctrine of the mutual indwelling between the persons of the Trinity is called *perichoresis*, a critical part of seeking to understand how God can be three persons, yet remain one God. The three persons are not three parts of the one Godhead, but the three persons who so mutually indwell one another that they are “one” (John 10:30) in the midst of their diversity. This doctrine cannot fully explain the mystery of the Trinity, but it gives us at least a starting point to understand the unity of the three persons as one Triune God.

Of course, since the blind, deaf faith of the Jews rejects any suggestion that Jesus might be divine, they hear this description of the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son as further blasphemy. They seek to arrest him, but Jesus escapes from them (John 10:39). Jesus’ words continue to scandalize them because they refuse to account for the works that he has demonstrated in their midst.

John did no sign

The last few verses of John 10 are not disposable, for they provide a fitting conclusion to this story. When Jesus escapes, he returns and remains across the Jordan to the place where John the Baptist was baptizing at first (John 10:40). John tells us, “And many came to him. And they said, ‘John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.’ And many believed in him

there” (John 10:41–42). Their faith arises from both *words* and *works*. In this case, the people acknowledge that “John did no sign,” which sets apart Jesus because of the signs that Jesus *did* perform. As great as John the Baptist was as a prophet, he was unable to do any signs by which people might believe that *he* was the Christ.

On the other hand, “everything that John said about this man was true.” John the Baptist did not come as the Christ, but to be a forerunner to announce the coming of the Christ. He came as a witness, to identify Jesus as the Christ. The question that opened this dispute between the Jews and Jesus, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly,” has already been answered by John the Baptist, a faithful witness to Jesus. John himself did no sign, but he announced that *Jesus* would perform signs, which Jesus did. By all this evidence of words and works, it has become abundantly clear that Jesus is indeed the Christ. Why then do Jesus’ enemies still not believe?

Believe the Works!

Christianity depends on God’s *word*. God gives us his word to tell us about who he is, who we are, what creation is, how sin has destroyed the original goodness with which he created the world, and how God plans to redeem the world through the person and work of his Son. We must study the word, memorize the word, ponder the word, pray the word, sing the word, eat and drink the word, and treasure the word of God as it comes to us. God’s word creates his Church, for through Jesus’ word the sheep come out of the fold to follow their Good Shepherd (John 10:3–4, 16, 27). Without the word, there is no church and no salvation.

But from this, we should not think that Christianity is some kind of fiction or fantasy. The word of Jesus is not a really good story that we tell to make ourselves feel better about the misery of this world, or to inspire us to live better lives, or to give us some vague sense of hope. Christianity is a word *about* works—real works that happened in the real world by a real God who became a real, flesh-and-blood human being in order to die a real death and be raised up to reign over a real kingdom so that he might give us real life. The world contains no shortage of fairy tales and philosophies, but Christianity is different. Whether you like Jesus or not isn’t the real question. Ultimately, he demands that even if you do not believe him, you believe his *works*. Like it or not, Jesus has left behind works that have never been replicated or improved upon through his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.

Ultimately, no matter what your personal judgments of Jesus’ ethics, ideals, or justice, really only one question is important: *What will you do with his crowning achievement in his empty tomb?* Through his death and resurrection, Jesus proves that he is the Lord of life, able to turn back the curse of sin and death in order to restore abundant life to his creation, beginning with his people. Whatever we might desire from the Christ, Jesus gives us more. Therefore, even if you cannot believe in Jesus from his words, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in him, and he is in the Father.

Discussion Questions

1. What role does the *word* of Jesus play in our faith? Brainstorm as many roles as possible that the word of Jesus should play in our lives.

2. What role do the *works* of Jesus play in our faith? Brainstorm as many roles as possible that the works of Jesus should play in our lives.
3. What does Jesus teach us about his relationship to the Father in John 10:30 and 10:38? What practical value does our doctrine of the Trinity play in our lives?
4. If someone asked you, “Is Jesus the Christ?,” how would you answer? What does this passage give you to strengthen your apologetics—that is, your ability to give a rational defense for the faith?

Notes

1. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 391.
2. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 172–73.
3. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, 822.
4. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 391.
5. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 173.
6. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 392.
7. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 368.
8. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 392.
9. For more on the theology of the internal word vs. the external word, see Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, Reprint edition. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2002), 83–90.
10. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 414–15. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.v.html>>
11. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 369.
12. Cited in Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, 83.
13. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 463.
14. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 756.
15. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 393.
16. ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἑσμεν. Most literally, “I and the Father, one *we* are.” Jesus uses the pronoun “I” (*egō*) but not the pronoun “we”; however, Jesus uses the first person plural (“we”) form of “are” (*esmen*), which is a common convention in Greek.
17. For the word “entity,” see Köstenberger, *John*, 312.
18. “Augustine has answered that ἐν frees us from the Charybdis of Arianism, ἑσμεν from the Scylla of Sabellianism. If we had εἷς, this would mean that the two are one and the same person, producing patripassionism and other extravagant fancies. Jesus says, “we are ἐν,” “one thing, one being, one God, one Lord,” Luther. The two persons are not mingled, for Jesus clearly distinguishes between ἐγὼ and ὁ πατήρ; but these two, while they are two in person, are ἐν, one, a unit of substance, or, as we prefer, a unit of essence.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 759–60.)
19. Cited in *Ibid.*
20. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 417. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.v.html>>
21. Köstenberger, *John*, 312.
22. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 396.
23. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 396.

24. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 761–62.

25. For more on these three options, see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 397–99.

26. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 469.

27. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 399.

28. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 774.

29. “Jesus is not merely ‘the effective organ,’ and the Father ‘the determining potency.’ This might fit ‘the Father in me’; it would leave untouched the second and equal statement, ‘I in the Father.’ For exactly as the Father is in the Son, so the Son is in the Father. And these two are persons, hence their oneness is that of being. This is the ineffable mystery that Jesus, God’s own Son, is in essence one with his Father. ‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,’ 14:9. The relation of these two is an indissoluble interpenetration, equally from the Father to the Son, from the Son to the Father. For it the ancient church coined the term περιχώρησις *essentialis*, than which term no better one has yet been found. That this essential interpenetrating oneness of the divine persons should manifest itself dynamically goes without saying. An additional part of the mystery is the place of the human nature in this divine oneness. All that we may venture to say is that its part in this oneness is wholly passive and receptive through its union with the person of the Son.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 775.)