

The Gospel of John (39); The Fourth Discourse: Jesus, the Bread of Life (1)

Introduction:

In this Gospel the miracles of Jesus are “signs”, which testify to the identity of Jesus as God incarnate. But following these signs are discourses of Jesus. Before us in John 6 is the fourth discourse of Jesus contained in this Gospel. We have already considered three discourses. These included Jesus teaching on the subjects of (1) the new birth (3:1-21), (2) true worship (4:7-26), and (3) the One who gives life and who will judge the world (5:19-47). Here before us in John 6 is the fourth discourse in which Jesus shows Himself as *the true Bread from heaven* who gives eternal life to those who believe on Him (6:26-71).

This discourse of Jesus follows the sign that Jesus had given them through a miracle He had performed. Actually, there were two miracles immediately preceding this fourth discourse. We have recorded, first, Jesus feeding the 5,000, which was then, secondly, followed that night with Jesus walking upon the water of the Sea of Galilee. Many commentators identify the feeding of the miracle as the fourth sign of Jesus in this Gospel, which gives the context for the discourse on Jesus as the true bread from heaven. But others would say that Jesus walking upon the sea should also be regarded as one of the signs of this Gospel, even the fifth sign that Jesus gave.¹ But not all give this miracle the status of one of John’s signs. I believe that Jesus walking on the water is John’s fifth sign, which like the others, bears witness of the deity of our Lord Jesus.

Now we have described these recorded teaching sessions of Jesus as discourses. When we think of a discourse, we may simply envision one standing and giving a speech to a gathering. But actually the discourse before us is not a formal speech, such as He gave in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, this discourse is actually a dialogue which Jesus conducted with those who were before Him on this day. If your Bible happens to be a red letter edition, you can see clearly that John 6 contains a verbal exchange between Jesus and those who were before Him.

Since we are just beginning to consider this discourse today, we will read the entire passage. But in order to show forth the dialogue nature of this discourse, we have recoded before us the red letter form of this passage, in which the words of Jesus are in red font. Here is John 6:26 through 71 in the New King James Version.

²⁶Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

²⁸Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

³⁰Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³²Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

¹ Jesus walking on the sea is regarded as the fifth sign of Jesus in this Gospel by Leon Morris, as well as the editors of the Spurgeon Study Bible. See the heading at 6:16 in the **Spurgeon Study Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), p. 1430; also Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 347.

³⁴Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

³⁵And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

⁴¹The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” ⁴²And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

⁴³Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

⁵²The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

⁵³Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

⁵⁹These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

⁶⁰Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”

⁶¹When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

⁶⁶From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. ⁶⁷Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

⁶⁸But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

⁷⁰Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” ⁷¹He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

In order to understand this passage in smaller units, we will employ this outline:

- I. Doing the work of God (6:26-29)
- II. God the Father sent Jesus to give eternal life to His elect. (6:30-40)
- III. The Father gives eternal life to the one who believes on His Son. (6:41-51)
- IV. No one has eternal life except through “feeding” upon Jesus Christ (6:52-59)
- V. Only those enabled by God’s sovereign grace will believe on Jesus Christ unto eternal life (6:60-71)

I. Doing the work of God (6:26-29)

The discourse begins with Jesus confronting the crowd before Him for seeking Him with wrong motives. He had fed the 5,000 the day before, which moved that crowd to become excited and enthusiastic “followers”, even seeking Him out the next morning after He had traveled across the Sea of Galilee. They would have forced Him to become their king; they were that much enamored with His ability to provide for them and for their cause. But Jesus rebuked them for their faulty reason for seeking Him. We read in **verse 26**, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”*

We see from our Lord’s response to them that...

A. They were seeking Him for the wrong reason (6:26)

The miracles were signs, which pointed to His identity as God incarnate, that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was both man and God. But these people did not see the miracle of the multiplying of the loaves and fish as a sign which revealed to them the true identity and nature of Jesus. They were impressed regarding the miracle itself and for what benefit that might be further brought to them if He became their King. They were enamored with the loaves they ate, not with the true identity of the person who had the power to multiply the loaves. In short, rather than the sign leading them to know and believe Him, and to serve Him, they desired that He serve them by becoming their easy and ready source for what they needed and wanted.

I wonder if much of modern church ministry philosophy, which claims to know how we may reach the world “for Jesus”, would have us present Jesus in terms that would have satisfied this crowd. It is as though we were to hold before them this promise: “If you believe on Jesus, you will be forever provided for, your greatest longings will be realized, He will meet all of your needs.” And although there is a certain measure of truth to this idea, it really is 180 degrees out of sync with what should be conveyed to the world. These miracles in John’s Gospel are signs which reveal Jesus to be the Son of God, whom the Father has appointed to be Lord over heaven and earth. We are responsible to see this truth and respond to it by repentance from our sinful independence, self-indulgence, and self-ordered existence, and to believe and submit unto Him as Lord. Yes, all those who do so shall be blessed eternally, but were are to seek Him and to know Him for who He is, not merely for the things that He might give us. Jesus rebuked them, saying, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”*

Our Lord revealed these “followers” to be insincere and corrupt in seeking Him. In essence they were hypocrites. **Richard Sibbes** (1577-1635) wrote of them and then drew a lesson for all people everywhere.

He (Jesus) convinceth them of their fault, and their hypocrisy, of their wicked and carnal aims to holy business. They come flattering of Christ: but as He was too holy to flatter, so He was too wise to be flattered. He deals therefore directly with them, thoroughly convinceth them of their hypocrisy and corrupt aims in following after Him. We are all naturally prone to these carnal ends in holy actions. We must take heed with what minds, with what hearts, we come before God, whose eyes are brighter than the sun, who regards not so much what we do, as with minds we do it.²

Now granted, even as Christians we grow in our understanding and recognition of why it is we are to seek Him. According to the Synoptic Gospels³ even the disciples had failed to see the meaning of the “sign” of the loaves.

² Richard Sibbes, **Works of Richard Sibbes**, vol. 6 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 859.

³ The Synoptic Gospels include Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are called Synoptics because they record for the most part the same events are often in the same order with one another. John’s Gospel is quite distinctive in both content and style and so is not among the Synoptic Gospels.

According to the Synoptic narrative, even the twelve ‘did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened’ (Mark 6:52; cf. Mark 8:14-21), so it is not surprising that the crowd failed to grasp the message. But while the Synoptic narrative simply leaves us with the feeling that beneath the surface of the miraculous feeding there was more than met the eye, John proceeds to bring that hidden meaning to light, by recording Jesus’ discourse about the bread of life, delivered in the synagogue of Capernaum (cf. v. 59).⁴

We are to believe on Jesus and obey Him as our Lord and Savior, even if we receive nothing from His hand in this life. Even though we may know that only trial and trouble lie before us for following our Lord, we are resolved that those things will not deter us. In following Christ Paul could say “that imprisonment and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:23). We are not to believe on Him and follow Him motivated solely for what we might receive from Him in this life. We are to seek Him and believe on Him for who He is and for what He was sent to do. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, whom the Father sent to save sinners from their sin by placing their faith in Him.

If we are to be faithful to those who hear us regarding faith in Jesus Christ, we must instruct them in the difficulties, in the hardship, and in the suffering that is the common experience of true disciples of Jesus Christ. Our Lord before us in John 6 was thinning the crowd of fair weather sailors, ones who would only sail with Him on calm seas. He was faithful to them. This was the common way in which He would deal with souls. When one came to Him resolved “to follow” Him, He set before them the cost of being His disciple. We read of this in Luke’s Gospel.

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Luke 9:57f)

Charles Spurgeon wrote of our Lord’s dealings with the crowds in a sermon he entitled, *Fickle Followers*.

Our Savior never refused anybody who came to Him, and who ought to have been accepted by Him. His own words were, “Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” That is a true description of His dealing with men at all times. If they do but come sincerely and truly, He always welcomes them. On the other hand, He did not shovel them in indiscriminately; He did not gather them to Himself wholesale. He did not go about, as it were, soliciting their patronage, willing to take in anybody so long as He could swell the number of His followers. Oh, no! We have good evidence here that He knew how to shut the door as well as to open it. He knew as well how to warn the pretentious as to accept the penitent. He was ready for the sincere with open heart and open hand; but He was faithful to those who were self-deceived, or those who, through ignorance, professed what was not really true. Now, we ought to be the same, dear friends. We should always be anxious to receive all who will come to Christ. At the same time, we must exercise judgment, and not put down everybody as converted simply because he says that he is; but we must judge, and watch, and try, and test, lest we help self-deception, and come to be the servants of Satan by bolstering up the delusions of mistaken men and women.

B. Our chief concern and aim in life should be to obtain eternal life (6:27)

After rebuking them, Jesus instructed them. He said in **verse 27**, “*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*”

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 150.

The people were “laboring.” They were right to be laboring. The problem, however, was that these people were laboring for the wrong kind of food. Jesus said, **“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...”**

What did our Lord mean by laboring “for the food that perishes”? He was speaking of all earthly things for which fallen man lives for rather than for God. Again, to quote **Richard Sibbes**:

All earthly and outward things are the food that the natural man feeds upon. The soul of the covetous man feeds upon his money, applauding himself he is worth so much and so much. The ambitious man, chameleon-like, feeds upon the air, upon the airy applause of the people. The sensual man feeds upon base and sensual pleasures. In a word, all carnal men, natural men, are condemned to that sentence of the serpent, ‘to eat dust,’ to feed upon outward, earthly, perishing things. So that everything that is not grace and glory, or the means that lead to it, is a perishing thing.⁵

Sibbes went on to state how we may tell if we are guilty of laboring wrongly.

But how shall we know when our labour is immoderate, unseasonable, and inordinate after earthly things?

I answer, in a word, when they either hinder us from, or hinder us in, holy things; when they keep us from holy duties, as from the sanctifying of the Lord’s Day, or from any other service of God; or when they hinder us in them; when they fill us with distractions; when they turn the soul from the business in hand. Thus, when they do either hinder us from or hinder us in better things, we may know we offend against this dissuasion of Christ. “Labour not for the meat that perisheth.”⁶

Rather than laboring for food that perishes, we are to be laboring for **“the food which endures to everlasting life.”** We give ourselves over to diligence in laboring for spiritual food, that which will nourish us in faith, that which will result in receiving grace from our Lord to help us on our journey of faith which will end in receiving the gift of eternal life. When people ask us why it is we give ourselves over to what they think are extreme efforts, even too extreme diligence to seek Christ and to walk with Him in faith and obedience, we may tell them, “I am following my Lord’s instructions to spend this life in labor for the food that endures to everlasting life.” Again, **Richard Sibbes** sought to challenge his listeners in this matter:

It is a strange thing that persons should persuade themselves that they are Christians, and yet go from day to day without refreshing themselves with Christ, and with the meditation of the blessed estate they are in by Him, both in respect to this world and that which is to come; without getting strength from Christ against tentations (temptations) and against corruptions. Christ is food, and the promises and prerogatives we have by Him are food. We should labor after it every day, feed on it every day. If a man should ask a man in his calling (work), Why do you take such pains, morning and evening, rising early and going to bed late? He would answer, It is good to get bread; it is to get food to maintain my family. So should it be our answer to any that wonder why we take such pains for our souls, why we labour so after Christ. Oh, remember we take pains for life; to get and maintain life; and what is necessary as life? And if life be so necessary, food which preserves it must be necessary. We see the patriarchs for food left their country; and the poor Egyptians sold themselves and their cattle, and all to get food to keep life. We famish eternally except we feed on Christ; except we have so much faith as makes us one with Him; except by faith we digest Him and get nourishment and strength from Him. It will be so when it is too late. Before long nothing in the world will relish us; and then if we have not Christ and the things of another life to relish us, what will become of us? I beseech you, consider what opinion and judgment we shall have before long of these earthly things, and of the better things of another world. At the hour of death, our judgments will be convinced that the things of heaven are the

⁵ Richard Sibbes, **Works of Richard Sibbes**, vol. 6 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 360.

⁶ Ibid, p. 363.

best things; and if it be true that they will be so then, why is it not true that they are so now? Labour to have the same judgment now.⁷

The Lord was using the metaphor of “physical food” to illustrate their need to seek and receive “spiritual food.” This is consistent with the presentation of our Lord’s interaction with people in this Fourth Gospel. He spoke with Nicodemus of the physical birth in contrast to the new birth. He spoke to the Samaritan woman of literal water in contrast to spiritual water. And here, He addressed the crowds regarding physical bread to illustrate their need for spiritual bread, which was He Himself.

The contrast here between perishable and spiritual food is similar to the contrast between material water and spiritual water in Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well (John 4:10ff.). As the water in Jacob’s well could not provide the soul-refreshment which ‘living water’ provided, so food which ‘perishes with the using’ (Col. 2:22) might sustain physical life but could not impart life eternal. As Jesus in chapter 4 is the giver of that water which bubbles up to eternal life in those who receive it, so here He is the giver of the food whose properties are such that those who eat of it will never hunger again.⁸

Now in verse 27, after the Lord Jesus told these many people that they were to labor “for the food which endures to everlasting life”, He declared to them that He would “give” them this food as the Son of man. Again, verse 27 reads, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, *which the Son of Man will give you...*”

Even though Jesus spoke in terms of their “labor” which would result in eternal life, the Lord makes it clear that eternal life is received because it was a *gift*, not earned. Everywhere in the Gospel of John salvation/eternal life is the gift of God, not earned by our labor or works.⁹

How could they be sure that He is able to grant them eternal life and that He will be true to His promise? The rest of verse 27 states why He can be believed. Again, Jesus said: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, *because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*”

God had authenticated the identity and the works of His Son. This is what the *signs* “signify” in this Gospel. The signs that Jesus did was God the Father setting His seal upon His Son.

The clause “for on Him has God the father set His seal” speaks of the exclusive (“on *Him*”) appointment and authorization of the Son of man as the bringer of salvation. The idea that this sealing refers to a specific event in Jesus’ life, specifically to His baptism (as some interpreters think), is not likely. This Gospel never mentions Jesus’ baptism. The reference is rather to the divine authorization of the Son of man as such. It is for that reason that one should zealously labor for the food that He gives and not labor merely for earthly bread.¹⁰

The puritan, **John Flavel** (1627-1691), gave a sermon on this last clause of verse 27, “*because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*” In beginning to address this statement, he gave a good summary of the verses that we have already considered.

This scripture is a part of Christ’s excellent reply to a self-ended generation, who followed him, not for any spiritual excellencies that they saw in Him, or soul-advantages they expected by Him, but for

⁷ Ibid, p. 371.

⁸ Ibid, p. 150.

⁹ See 1:13, 17, 29; 3:3, 5, 16; 4:10, 14, 36, 42, 5:21; 6:27, 33, 37, 39, 44, 51, 55, 65; 8:12, 36; 10:7-9, 28, 29; 11:25, 51, 52; 14:2, 3, 6; 15:5; 17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24; and 18:9.

¹⁰ Herman Ridderbos, **The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary** (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 225.

bread. Instead of making His service their treat and drink, they only served Him, that they might eat and drink. Self is a thing that may creep into the best hearts and actions; but it only predominates in the hypocrite. These people had sought Christ from place to place, and having at last found Him, they salute Him with an impertinent compliment, “Rabbi, whence camest thou hither?” verse 25. Christ’s reply is partly dissuasive, and partly directive. He dissuades them from putting the secondary and subordinate, in the place of the principal and ultimate end; not to prefer their bodies to their souls, their fleshly accommodations to the glory of God. “Labour not for the meat that perisheth.” Wherein He does not take them off from their lawful labours and callings; but He dissuades them, first, from minding those things too intently: and, secondly, He dissuades them from that odious sin of making religion but a pretense for the belly.

And it is partly directive, and that in the main end and business of life. “But labour for that meat which endureth to eternal life;” to get bread for your souls to live eternally by. And, that He might engage their diligence in seeking it to purpose, He shows them not only where they may have it, [“which the Son of man shall give you”] but also how they may be fully satisfied, that He has it for them, in the clause I have pitched on; “For Him has God the Father sealed.”¹¹

Flavel went on to describe *the nature of this sealing of Jesus by God His Father and the implications of that sealing for us*. These include the following:

1. God the Father gave His Son authority and power. The sealing of Jesus by His Father was His investing in Jesus all authority and power to represent Him and to work on His behalf. Because Jesus was sealed by the Father, He came with the authority of the Father. Flavel wrote, “Though all the persons in the Godhead are equal in nature, dignity and power, yet in their operation there is an order observed among them; the Father sends the Son, the Son is sent by the Father, the Holy Ghost is sent by both.”
2. God the Father has given this authority to Jesus, the Son of man. This is unique to the Lord Jesus. “God the Father has so sealed Him, as He never sealed any other before Him, or that shall rise after Him... ‘The government is upon His shoulders’ (Isa. 9).”
3. The manner in which the Father conferred authority to His Son was by way of sealing Him. This was the Father both conferring authority on Him in order to commission Him and empower Him to accomplish the purpose for which the Father sent Him. “Like as princes, by sealed credentials, confirm the authority of those that are sent by them”, so God the Father sealed the Son of man.

Flavel then set forth *the role or work for which the Father had sealed the Son of man*.

1. God the Father sealed Jesus with *a commission to proclaim the gospel of salvation to poor sinners*. In His home town synagogue we read that Jesus opened the scroll of Isaiah, finding the place and then saying. We read of this in **Luke 4:17ff**.

¹⁷And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

¹⁸“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives

¹¹ John Flavel, **The Fountain of Life; Presenting Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory** (Baker Book House, 1977), p. 62.

And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
¹⁹To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

²⁰Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

2. God the Father sealed Jesus *unto His priesthood*. God the Father commissioned Him to fulfill the obligation required by the Father of all humanity. He gave Jesus the authority and commission to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, the elect whom He represented before His Father. This was an act of obedience on His part. His entire life was a single act of obedience, in which He ordered His life according to the law of God and then willingly offered Himself as an offering for sin, as a substitutionary sacrifice for His people. But not only did the Father seal Jesus to fulfill our obligations to the Father, but the Father also sealed Him to intercede on our behalf. “Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:25).

3. But thirdly, God the Father sealed the Son of man, Jesus Christ, to reign as *King over His kingdom*. By the Father’s commission and conferral, the risen Christ was granted “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18).

The Father sealed the Son of man toward these glorious ends. This was not only a conferring of authority on His Son as the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The Father sealed “the Son of man; that is, the Father sealed His Son as the incarnate Son of God and the Son of David. Yes, it was conferred upon His eternal Son, but, yes also, it was conferred on one like us in our human nature. The Father sealed this Man, Jesus Christ, with this authority and empowered Him to be our Prophet; He reveals God to us. But also, the Father sealed this Man, Jesus Christ, and commissioned Him to be our Priest, to atone for our sins and to continually support us in our walk of faith. And the Father sealed this Man, Jesus Christ, with this authority and empowered Him to be our King, so that He could and would save us from our sin to the uttermost. Therefore, by the Father having sealed Jesus of Nazareth, the Father enabled Him to reveal salvation to us through His prophetic office, to obtain salvation for us through His priestly office, and to apply salvation to us by His royal (kingly) authority.

Whatever our Savior did, whatever our Savior does, whatever our Savior will do on our behalf, has the authorization of God the Father to do so on our behalf. Whatever He does is fully ratified, fully endorsed by the Father, who sent Him and sealed Him to be our Savior. The sealing of the Father, therefore, is a stamp of God’s acknowledgement of Jesus Christ’s complete qualification to be our Savior. As **Flavel** wrote:

It imports Christ’s complete qualification, or instrumental fitness to serve the Father’s design and end of our recovery. Had not God known Him to be every way fit, and qualified for the work, He would never have sealed Him a commission for it. Men may, but God will not seal an unfit, or incapable person, for His work. And, indeed, whatever is desirable in a servant, was eminently found in Christ: for faithfulness, none like Him. Moses indeed was faithful to a pin, but still as a servant: but Christ as a Son (Heb. 3:2). He is the faithful and true witness (Rev. 1:5). For zeal, none like Him. The zeal of God’s house did eat Him up (John 2:16, 17). He was so intent upon His Father’s works that He forgot to eat bread, counting His work His meat and drink (John 4:32). Yea, and love to His Father carried Him on through all His work, and made Him delight in the hardest piece of His service; for He served Him as a Son (Heb. 3:5, 6). All that ever He did was done in love. For wisdom, none like Him. The Father knew Him to be most wise, and said of Him before He was employed, “Behold My servant shall deal prudently” (Isa. 52:13). To conclude, for self-denial, never any like Him; He sought not His own glory, but the glory of Him that sent Him (John 8:50). Had He not been thus

faithful, zealous, full of love, prudent, and self-denying, He had never been employed in this great affair.¹²

C. The work of God is to believe in Jesus Christ as the one God the Father sent to bring salvation to sinners. (6:28f)

²⁸*Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”*

²⁹*Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”*

It would seem that these people were sincere in asking Jesus what works God required of them in order to obtain eternal life. But there was a sinful self-sufficiency about them, a self-perception that they were capable of doing anything that God would expect or require of them. As one wrote,

They respond by focusing all attention on work: (lit.) ‘What must we do in order to work the works of God?’ The expression ‘the works of God’ does not refer to the works that God performs, but to *the works God requires*. Their question therefore resolves into this: Tell us what works God requires, and we will perform them. From John’s perspective, their naiveté is formidable. They display no doubt about their intrinsic ability to meet any challenge God may set before them; they evince no sensitivity to the fact that eternal life is first and foremost a gift within the purview of the Son of Man (v. 27).¹³

Matthew Henry wrote of their sincerity in asking Jesus this question.

Their *enquiry* was *pertinent* enough (v. 28): *What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?* Some understand it as a pert question: “What works of God can we do more and better than those we do in obedience to the Law of Moses?” But I rather take it as a humble serious question, showing them to be, at least for the present, in a good mind, and willing to know and do their duty; and I imagine that those who asked this question, *How and What* (v. 30), and made the request (v. 34), were not the same persons with those that murmured (vs. 41, 42), and strove (v. 52), for those are expressly called *the Jews*, who came out of Judea (for those were strictly called Jews) to cavil, whereas these were of Galilee, and came to be taught. This question here intimates that they were convinced that those who would obtain this everlasting meat, (1.) Must aim to do something great. Those who *look high* in their expectations, and hope to enjoy the *glory of God*, must *aim high* in those endeavours, and study to *do the works of God*, works which he requires and will accept, *works of God*, distinguished from the works of worldly men in their worldly pursuits. It is not enough to speak the words of God, but we must do the works of God.¹⁴

And so, it would seem that this people asked Jesus a serious question and we read that Jesus gave them a clear and concise answer. In **verse 29** we read, “*Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’*” They were prepared, so they thought, to do many works: “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” But Jesus responded by speaking of one work, and this was not their work, but of God’s work in them.

They enquire after the *works* of God (in the plural number), being careful about *many things*; but Christ directs them to one work, which includes all, the one thing needful: that *you believe*, which supersedes all the works of the ceremonial law; the work which is necessary to the acceptance of all the other works, and which produces them, for without faith you cannot please God. It is *God’s work*, for it

¹² Flavel, **The Fountain of Life**, p. 66.

¹³ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 285.

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 946.

is of his *working in us*, it subjects the soul to his working on us, and quickens the soul in working *for him*, (2.) That faith is the work of God which closes with Christ, and relies upon him. It is to *believe on him* as one whom God *hath sent*, as God's commissioner in the great affair of peace between God and man, and as such to *rest* upon him, and *resign ourselves* to him.¹⁵

The one principal thing we are to do is to have faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This is the "work" that God requires of us.

But there may be a different way to understand our Lord's words here in verse 29. **Robert Lenski** (1864-1936) explained it this way:

He keeps the term "work," the verb for which He used in v. 27, and by one stroke corrects the wrong idea put into it by these people. He turns their wrong plural, "the works of God," into the correct singular, "this is the work of God." He makes the genitive "of God" mean, not "commanded by God," but "wrought by God."¹⁶

Do you understand the point that he was making? When they asked Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?", they were asking what works God required from them. But when Jesus responded to them, He spoke of God's work in them. Grammatically speaking, when they asked about "the works *of God*", the genitive noun, "of God", was a *genitive of command*. But the answer of Jesus regarding "the work of God", was a *subjective genitive*, the work that God performed in them. In other words, Jesus was not telling them what work they were to perform—believing in Him—but what work that God would do in them, *bringing them to believe on Him*. It was not their work for God but His work in them, so as to secure their believing in Him.

We, indeed, must do the believing, but our believing is the work of *God*. *We* trust, but *God* kindles that trust in us... "Faith is the operation of God" (Col. 2:12).¹⁷

Now when our Lord said to them, "This is the work of God, *that you believe in Him whom He sent*," He used a verb form for "believe" that had a precise meaning. Jesus was not saying that the work of God would be to produce a single act of faith on the part of those whom God will save from their sin. This is the present tense (and subjunctive mood) of the verb which emphasizes continuous believing. This is the work of God's grace in the soul of the one He has purposed to save, that he becomes a believer, a continual, persevering believer in His Son. This is the work of God that He performs in the heart and life of the one He has purposed to save through Jesus Christ.

Matthew Henry expressed it this way:

It is *God's work*, for it is of His *working in us*, it subjects the soul to His working *for him*. It is to *believe on Him* as one whom God *hath sent*, as God's commissioner in the great affair of peace between God and man, and as such to *rest* upon Him, and *resign ourselves* to Him.¹⁸

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 947.

¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 455.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ **Matthew Henry's Commentary**, vol. 5, p. 947.