

John 5:18 “but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself **equal** with God”¹
השלוח שיה לשולחו “The one sent is **equal** to his sender”
Mishnah Berachot 5:5 אדם כמותו של אדם “a man’s agent is like unto himself”.

In the Gospel of John chapter 5, Jesus healed a lame man at the Pools of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Following the miracle, John records in John 5:16-18 ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." ¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself **equal** with God.

John 5:18 has been one of the standard passages that trinitarians interpret as showing the deity of Jesus. According to the trinitarian claim, the Judean leaders statement that Jesus “made himself equal with God” is to understood that Jesus is “co-equal” and of the same substance as God, and therefore is God himself. It is often said that the Jewish leaders’ *correctly* interpreted Jesus calling God his Father as a claim to be God. The reason why Jesus couldn’t be accused of blasphemy was because he *was* God (or so the claim goes).²

My position is that neither Jesus’ calling God his own Father, nor the Judean’s accusation against him of “making himself equal with God” should be understood as a claim of deity (an equality of essence with God). Rather, both Jesus’ claim, and the Judean’s accusation, should be understood in light of the law of agency, as an equality of representative authority, encapsulated in the Hebraic proverb: “the one sent is **equal** to his sender”

The Law of the Agent (Ha-shaliah השליח)

The main point of the Jewish law of agency is expressed in the statement, “a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself” (Berachot 5:5, Nedarim 72b; Kiddushin 41b)³. Quote: “Rabbi Yonatan said to him: We have found everywhere in the Torah that the **legal status** of a person’s **agent is as of himself**” (Nedarim 72b). The agent’s actions are the will of the sender, and are legally binding. “Therefore, any act committed by a duly appointed agent is regarded as having been committed by the principal...”⁴

In John 5, the Judean antagonists did not perceive Jesus *calling God his own Father* as a claim to metaphysical deity, but as a claim to be God’s human Son, the Messiah, God’s “sent one”, God’s authorized, chief representative. They understood Jesus, correctly, to be claiming that the work

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² See for instance Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, comments on John 5:17-30; Leon Morris, NICNT *The Gospel According to John*, 1971 (pp. 309-310); Beasley-Murray, G. R. (2002). *John* (Vol. 36, p. 79). Dallas: Word, Incorporated. There is some disconnect between more recent scholarly and popular understandings of this passage. The scholars are much less adamant in asserting “Jesus claimed to be God” in John 5.

³ The latter two references are Talmudic. Questions are asked as to what functions an agent can perform for the principal and how: sending a certificate of divorce or a marriage proposal, cancelling an unmarried woman’s vows, saying prayers, giving offerings, making vows, etc.

⁴ *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, R.J.Z. Werblowsky, G. Wigoder, 1986, p. 15. An interesting comparison is the modern State of Israel’s 1965 “Law of the Shaliach” https://www.nevo.co.il/law/html/Law01/P222K3_001.htm

was really done by and for God the Father *through* His designated agent. But because of pride and jealousy, these Judeans refused to believe Jesus and the amazing accompanying evidence the healing, basing their refusal on grounds of an infraction against the Sabbath. These Judeans apparently *did not* understand *why* Jesus accomplished the John 5 miracle on a Sabbath - see further below.

Excursus: Being “sent” in the Bible

Biblical passages which describe God "sending" humans⁵ are best understood in their Hebraic, yea verily *biblical* context, that is, in the *messenger* or *agency* motif of the Old Testament where the prophet is an emissary **sent** by Yahweh. Yes, angels were sent by God on occasion - their very name means “messenger”. But neither the prophets nor Jesus were angels. The language and context for the human Jesus as sent by God *is* the Bible. We note a few examples of biblical **sending** by God:

1. Moses (Exo. 3:13-15): God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, **has sent me** to you.' Note also Moses in the context of Korah's rebellion when the ground was about to swallow up the rebellious: And Moses said, "Hereby you shall know that the **LORD has sent me** to do all these works, and that it has **not been of my own accord** (Numbers 16:28, cf. John 5:30, 8:28).
2. The law of agency includes both words (or commandments) and deeds. To the Hebrew mind, words spoken by God's agent are God's words (Deut. 18:18)⁶; and, deeds done by the agent serve as evidence that God has **sent** the agent, *not* that the agent is God.
3. The prophets were sent by God. Jeremiah 7:25: “From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently **sent all my servants the prophets** to them, day after day.⁷
4. Isaiah the prophet was sent by God: Isaiah 6:8 (cf. 48:16): “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! **Send me.**"
5. Although Joseph is not described specifically as being sent by Pharaoh, the relationship between Pharaoh and Joseph illustrates the law of agency. Pharaoh gave Joseph the evidences of his authority (signet ring, clothing, necklace) and set Joseph over “all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:40-43). Joseph was given Pharaoh's authority, but was not Pharaoh himself.
6. John the Baptist was sent by God. John 1:6: “There was a man **sent from God**, whose name was John.” John 1:33: “I myself did not know him, but **he who sent me** to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'”

⁵ Including Jesus, cf. John 3:16, Gal 4:4; Rom 8:3

⁶ “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put **my words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I **command** him.”

⁷ The prophet Haggai is called the messenger (angel) of the LORD, מְלָאֲכָיִם יְהוָה (Hag. 1:13). So are the priests/Levites (Mal. 2:7).

7. The law of agency sending is seen in a comparison of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10.

<p>Matthew 8:5-6 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, ⁶ "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."</p>	<p>Luke 7:2-3 Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.</p>
<p>Matthew 8:7-8 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."</p>	<p>Luke 7:6 And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."</p>

Matthew can say that the centurion was present because the centurion’s messenger(s) fully represented the centurion. Military personnel are familiar with the law of agency. The lieutenant can, if granted the authority, legally represent a colonel, etc.

8. Jesus was sent by God. But Jesus was sent as a Son not just as a servant (Jer. 7:25), as described in the parable of the tenants and vineyard owner in Matt. 21:37-38: “Finally he sent his son to them, saying, **‘They will respect my son.’** ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’”
9. The law of agency, even double agency, was stated by Jesus: **John 13:20** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (cf. Matt. 10:40)⁸

Not only from the entire Scripture, but specifically in the Gospel of John we have the language and context of what it means to be *sent* by God. Being sent by God involves a human being having a special commission from God, coming in the authority of God. “Sending” language is agency language.

Chronological Context of the Bethesda Healing

By the time of the healing of the lame man at Bethesda, Jesus was already a well-known figure both in Galilee and Judea. Jesus had cleansed the temple and gained a significant popular following of a multitude disciples in Judea months before the Bethesda healing:

John 2:23 “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, **many believed in his name** when they saw the signs that he was doing.”

⁸ Although somewhat outside of the scope of this presentation, in like manner New Testament phrases “come from God” and “from heaven” can be understood in a biblical cultural and linguistic background, not Hellenistic. Recorded in the Gospel of John, the Jewish teacher Nicodemus informs us what it means to “come from God”: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher **come from God**, for no one can do these signs that you do unless **God is with him**” (John 3:2). Likewise, in the New Testament “from heaven” can mean the event, word or person on earth has its origin in God as opposed to being merely of human initiative. “The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” (Matt. 21:25). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17). In English we say “my wife is heaven sent”. In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ opponents are the ones who don’t understand these “figures of speech” (6:52, 8:27, 10:6, 16:29).

John 4:1, 3 “Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that **Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John... he left Judea** and departed again for Galilee. “More disciples than John” means Jesus had thousands of disciples already by John chapter 4.⁹

In John 5, after a period of ministry in Galilee, Jesus came back to Judea for a Jewish festival. By this time the Judean leadership (“the Jews” of the Gospel of John), for reasons of pride and jealousy, were against Jesus and desired to discredit him in the eyes of the multitude as a candidate for Messiah. The crux of the Judean leaders’ argument was this: “He can’t be God’s Messiah, he can’t be God’s representative, if he breaks the Sabbath.” They used an infraction against their long standing interpretative religious tradition (how to keep the Sabbath) as a reason not to believe Jesus.

New Creation in the Gospel of John

There is a growing recognition even among traditional trinitarian Christian commentators that the Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Messiah through whom God inaugurates the New Creation.¹⁰ From the opening words of John’s Gospel the correlation of Jesus to the New Creation is put forth: “In the beginning!” John boldly starts out in echo of Genesis 1:1. The theme of New Creation is a thread running through the Gospel, from beginning to end. In his prayer the night before his crucifixion, Jesus words: John 17:4 “I have finished the work which you gave me to do” and his last words on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:28, 30) parallel Gen. 2:1-3, “on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done”. Jews expected (indeed, expect) the regeneration to come with Messiah. In the Gospel of John, the words and deeds of Jesus are evidence that Jesus is the Messiah Son of God through whom the re-generation of new life comes. It is the Jesus of the Gospel of John after all who states: “You must be born again”.

The “making whole”, or “making complete” (5x in John 5, John 5:4, 6, 9, 11, 14; also, 7:23) of the lame man is a sign that through Jesus the rejuvenation of creation comes. The great hope of Israel expressed by the prophet Isaiah is here! “Then the eyes of **the blind** shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall **the lame man** leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

The Sabbath and New Creation – the Timing of the Miracle

The Sabbath was a sign of the completion of God’s work and therefore a hope of the eventual restoration of all to wholeness. But the completion, the restoration, the New Creation, has not yet come, so in a certain sense God is “yet working” (John 5:17).

John 5:16 says: “this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” The verb tenses express a summary, continual aspect. The John 5 is one example of a continual state of affairs. The Judean leaders used an interpreted infraction of

⁹ Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII 5.1-2, translated by William Whiston.

¹⁰ Google “New Creation in the Gospel of John”. For instance: “The Seven Days of New Creation in John’s Gospel. Thomas Barrosse. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Oct. 1959), pp. 507-516; <https://ntwrightonline.org/2170-2/>; <https://tabletalktheology.com/2016/04/01/new-creation-in-johns-gospel/>; https://redeeminggod.com/new_creation/;

Sabbath to oppose Jesus. They missed the significance of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath. Jesus performance of two Jerusalem miracles described in the Gospel of John, both done on the Sabbath, are signs that Jesus is the one through whom God establishes the New Creation. Jesus is the one through whom wholeness, completeness, rest, in short, the New Creation Sabbath comes. The Judean leadership either missed this implication, or outright rejected it. I suspect both.

John 5:1-15 A Geographical Significance to the the Healing at the Pools of Bethesda.

The location of the miracle also communicates that Jesus is the Son of David facilitator of the restored kingdom to come. The Gospels describe only two miracles of Jesus done in Jerusalem. Both are in the Gospel of John. The synoptic Gospels describe no miracle of Jesus done in Jerusalem (see below). First, note that Bethesda (Place of Mercy, Grace, Covenant Loyalty) is a real place (PowerPoint slides) partially excavated on the north side of the Temple Mount. The two main pools¹¹ were huge water reservoirs, each pool about 60 x 100' x 25' deep, that caught rainwater during the rainy season for use during the long dry summer. There may have also been a small spring in the area. The pools were surround by five porticoes, or colonnaded walkways. Probably one on each side, and the fifth on a dyke separating the pools.

The Bethesda Pools are on the north side of the Temple Mount. Now note the location of the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus sent a blind man for healing on the Sabbath (John 9). Siloam, which means "sent" (a double entendre, as Jesus is the one sent by God as the agent for healing) is on the southern tip of the ancient Davidic/Solomonic city. Jesus' two miracles in Jerusalem, both done on Sabbath, outline the northern and southern limits of the Solomonic city of Jerusalem. These miracles were concrete signs, evidences, samples, tastes, that Jesus is, like Solomon, the promised Son of David, Son of God who brings in the kingdom and mankind's desired restoration. The lame shall leap. The blind shall see.

I said earlier that there are no miracles of Jesus in Jerusalem described in the Synoptics. But that is not entirely true. In the last week of Jesus life on earth, just after he cleansed the temple a 2nd time, Matthew 21:14 tells us: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." On the Temple Mount, where God and the king resided. This is the King who brings restoration!¹²

A quick look at John 5:1-16

John 5:1 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

After this...as mentioned, Jesus had been ministering in Galilee. He "interrupted" his Galilean ministry to come to this festival.

festival of the Jews...The fact that John doesn't say which festival this is, while he specifically names all the other festivals that Jesus came to (Passover 2x, Tabernacles, Hanukah), suggests John wants us to see *in Jesus* a general fulfillment of all the expectations of the biblical festivals.

¹¹ The north pool may be the Upper Pool of Isaiah 7:3, 36:2 and 2 Kings 18:17.

¹² Acts 3:8 and 4:10. Another lame man healed in the temple mount vicinity, this time by the sent agents of Jesus, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The man was leaping in Solomon's Porticoes. Again, evidence that it is by this man Jesus that God brings the restoration kingdom.

Like the Sabbath rest, the festivals are reminders of how God worked in the past, but also look forward to the eschatological renewed kingdom on earth.

John 5:3 “In these lay a multitude of invalids- blind, lame, and paralyzed.” This is a reminder of the human condition, yet longing for restoration. All creation groans for completeness to come. The proximity to the Temple Mount shows the powerlessness of the priestly religious leadership of Jerusalem to do anything about the situation. In contrast to the Jerusalem establishment, the power of God was with **Jesus** to heal (cf. Luke 5:17, another paralytic in Galilee).

It is remarkable that the religious authorities care little that a man has been healed, made whole, in a real sense, given life. Their concern is to discredit Jesus with an infraction against their tradition. They completely miss or ignore the sign, its grandeur and purpose. Their mindset is evident again when the blind man was given sight in John 9. All they care to prove is: “This man is a sinner” (John 9:16, 24).

The manuscript evidence makes it pretty certain that John 5:4 was not in the original Gospel. The claim that the “first one down” gets the healing is out of step with the nature of God. Rather, the event shows that Jesus is the channel of restoration, not Jewish mysticism or pagan gods like Asclepius.

John 5:17-18 ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." ¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself **equal** with God.

Again, Trinitarians claim Jesus words “my Father and the religious authorities statement “equal with God” show that Jesus claimed to be God. My RSV Harper Study Bible section heading says: “Jesus claims to be God”. But this is a wrong understanding for at least three reasons:

1. The meaning of the Greek word ἴσον *eison* translated as “equal.”

Translating, i.e., interpreting, the Greek word ἴσον as “equal” is an important issue. The word is used in only 8x in the New Testament. In Matt. 20:12 the varying vineyard laborers were made “equal” in pay. Luke 6:34 also describes an “equal amount” of pay. In Acts 11:17 the “same gift” was given to both Jews and Gentiles. In Rev. 21:16 the sides of the New Jerusalem are of “equal length”. In each case at least two distinct objects are involved. Perhaps the most clarifying use of the word is in Mark 14:56, 59 where the word means “consistent” or “in agreement” to describe the inconsistent testimony of the false witnesses who accused Jesus: "their testimony was not **consistent/eison**", i.e., equal. It makes better sense to understand the equality of the Father and the Son here as that equality contained in the law of agency: the one sent is **equal** (consistent, in agreement and of the same legal authority) to the one who sent him. Interesting, this is the word that Paul used in Philippians 2:6. Jesus did not consider “equality” with God a thing to be grasped. It is likely that Paul means the equality, not of essence, but of legal authority that Jesus is granted as the divinely commissioned messenger of God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24, 28).

2. Calling God “my Father” is not a claim to deity.

Which leads to the second reason why traditional interpretation of John 5:19 is wrong. To the Hebraic, biblical mind, calling God “my Father” is not a claim to deity. That God is called humankind’s Father is an essential feature of the Bible. Based on Old Testament revelation, the Jewish people are God’s firstborn son (Exo. 4:22, Hos. 11:1). Isaiah states clearly, “You, Yahweh are our Father...” אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱבִינִי (Isa. 63:16). The Fatherhood of God is likewise consistently expressed in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of “your Father who is in heaven” and instructs his disciples to pray: “Our Father in heaven...” Near the end of the Gospel of John, Jesus declared: “I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God” (20:17).¹³

To the biblical mind, the Fatherhood of God is metaphorical, representing God’s role as the giver of life, and all that is encapsulated in the father-child relationship: intimacy, concern, discipline, care, representation, and not the least of which, inheritance. The son inherits the father’s property.

In comparison, to the Hellenist or Greek mind, fatherhood of God is metaphysical, having to do with substance and essence. Dionysus, for instance, since he is the son of Zeus¹⁴, is divine in essence. It was in this Hellenistic way that the church fathers of later centuries incorrectly interpreted the fatherhood of God in relation to Jesus.

Many commentators have noticed the somewhat rare singular personal pronoun in Jesus’ words, “*my* Father”. Jews refer to God collectively as “our Father”, but rarely with the singular pronoun “*my* Father”. But is Jesus’ use of the singular pronoun a reason for us to jump over into the Hellenistic realm of father-son relationship of *essence*? The answer is clearly no, because there is a Hebrew-minded, biblical precedent to calling God “*my* Father”.

To call God “my Father” in the Hebraic, biblical world is not a claim to deity, and the Judean listeners would know so. Rather, calling God “my Father” is a claim to be Messiah, based on Scriptures. God promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:14 that David’s descendant “... will be **my son**, I will be **his Father**.” In Psalm 2:7 Yahweh says of the Messiah, “You are **my son**. Today I have begotten you”, and in Psalm 89:26 the Davidic king will call to Yahweh, saying, “You are **my Father, my God**, and the Rock of my salvation.” Jews knew, or should have known that the Messiah would call God “my Father”. As the Messianic Son, Jesus’ “my Father” is a claim to represent the Father, being vested with the Father’s full authority.

The antagonistic listeners’ claim is not “He claims to be God! Blasphemy!” Not to be overly disparaging, but that is an interpretation of John 5 that a Gentile Hellenist would come up with, being pre-disposed to interpret biblical language through a Hellenistic lens, or ignorant of what the Fatherhood of God means in the Bible. Rather, the Judeans’ claim is: “He can’t be Messiah, who will call God “my Father”. He can’t be God’s agent-son, equal to the sending-Father in legal

¹³ Compare the “Our Father, Our King” *Avinu Malchenu* אבינו מלכנו prayer said in the 10 Days of Awe and at public fasts.

¹⁴ But of a human mother. Dionysus was the god of wine and merry-making.

authority - *since* he breaks the Sabbath this way”. The Judean leaders want to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the multitude. The Judean leaders believe they have an excuse to reject Jesus’ messianic claim: “Someone who is God’s agent wouldn’t do things that God himself wouldn’t do. The Messiah wouldn’t do things that God did not commission him to do. The Messiah wouldn’t break our Sabbath.”

The Judean leaders view is summed up well in their statement following the healing of the blind man in John 9. “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath” (John 9:16). The claim, “We know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:24). The question is, is Jesus the Messiah, not “Is Jesus God?”. “... the Judeans had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22).

We might pause to ask, “Was Jesus breaking the Sabbath?” I believe the answer is “Yes, and no.” “Yes”, Jesus broke the Sabbath as this particular group of Judeans had defined it. We won’t go into legal definitions of healing or not on Sabbath (here Jesus healed by only speaking), or how heavy a burden was allowed on Sabbath. But the religious leadership used Jesus’ attitude to *their* traditional interpretation of Sabbath against him. On the other hand, “No” Jesus didn’t break the Sabbath because he kept it in the way that the Father intended. The “Sabbath accusation” is a question of authoritative tradition. Whose definition of keeping Sabbath is correct, the religious leadership’s (or at least a segment thereof), or Jesus’?¹⁵ As mentioned above, the religious leadership missed the reason Jesus did these restoration deeds on the Sabbath. The miraculous “making complete” on the Sabbath showed Jesus to be the agent of new creation restoration.

We also note that contrary to the Judean leaders’ accusation in John 5:18, Jesus didn’t “make himself equal to God”. Jesus did not “make himself” the messenger, equal in legal status to God. Rather, God commissioned Jesus with the authority. And Jesus did not shirk from his commission.

3. The Context of John 5:19-47 is all about agency, not metaphysical equivalence.

The third reason we can see that the tradition interpretation of John 5:18 is wrong is the context of the rest of John 5. The language and context of John 5 is all about **agency** (not **essence**). Let’s briefly survey John 5:19-47 and see that Jesus is not claiming to be God, but that his claim is to be God’s human messenger, God’s sent one. Everything in the chapter snaps into focus and becomes very understandable in this light. Look at a few examples, starting with the very next verse:

5:19 “Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son is not able to do anything of his own accord**, but only what he sees the Father doing.” This is agency language. The verb **δύναμαι** (have power, be able)

¹⁵ All the discussions between Jesus and the religious authorities about the Sabbath are really a disagreement over how and why the Sabbath should be kept. Whose interpretation is correct? See Matthew 12, Luke 6, Luke 13, John 9:14, etc.

may imply “have authority”. Note, “sees” is a present active verb, meaning what Jesus continues to do, not something Jesus did in a past pre-existent state (cf. 5:20, the next verse).

5:22 “The Father judges no one, but has *given* all judgment to the Son...” The agent is granted authority by the principal. The Jesus of the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, makes clear over and over again that all his authority has been *granted, given* to him. Such statements make no sense if Jesus is a divine co-existent, co-eternal member of a “god-head”.

5:23 “that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father **who sent him.**” This verse, used by trinitarians to claim Jesus’ deity (“Jesus gets the same honor as the Father, so he must be God”). But Jesus’ statement is in the context of the law of agency: “the Father who **sent him**”. **To honor the messenger is to honor the one who sent him.** The “double honor” is not because Jesus is of the same essence as God, but because Jesus represents God. Not to honor the messenger is to dishonor the one who sent him. “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (Mt. 10:40, Jn. 13:20).

5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him **who sent me** has eternal life. Some 40x in the Gospel of John it is stated by Jesus or claimed by the Gospel writer that Jesus was sent. This is agency language.

5:25-27. “...the hour is coming, and now is...” Jesus claims two specific authorities or abilities granted him by the Father. The Father *granted* the Son to have life in himself and the Father has *given him* authority to execute judgement. This is agency language. Jesus has Power of Attorney from the Father to raise the dead. Compare 1 Cor. 15:21: “For as by a man came death, so also by a **man** has come the resurrection from the dead”; and 1 Cor. 15:45b, “the last **Adam (man)** became a life-giving spirit”. Because the Father loves the Son, Jesus also has the authority from the Father to judge. Compare Acts 17:3, “he (God) has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness **by a man whom he has appointed**”; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” We should ponder in awe that God has granted such authority to man, indeed, a man (cf. Matt. 9:8).

“...**and now is...**” This is “already but not yet” language. Jesus’ deeds, like raising of the dead, are evidence, tastes, that the kingdom’s inauguration has begun, and that through him.¹⁶ But it waits completion: “the hour is coming”.

5:30 “**I do nothing on my own (authority)**” This is the second time in 11 verses that Jesus says this. Are we listening to him? If not, why not? The Trinitarian take on such verses is that in some way one person of a multi-personal “godhead” doesn’t act independently of another. Besides being strange speculation, such a suggestion is blind to the agency being presented in John’s entire Gospel, the rest of chapter 5, and in the very same and verse! “...because I seek not

¹⁶ When he returned to Galilee not long after the events of John 5, Jesus for the first time raised the dead, the widow’s son, Luke 7:12-15. He also raised Jairus daughter and Lazarus.

my own will but the will of **him who sent me.**” The agent does not speak or act on his own authority, but on the authority of the one who sent him. These words can be understood plainly knowing that Jesus is the sent agent of Yahweh. There is no need for speculations about interactions of divine co-equal persons.

5:31 “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true.” The agent with Power of Attorney comes with witness, evidence of his granted authority. I recently bought a house in Tennessee with my father. He was in California at the time. I couldn’t just go to the loan and title people and say “My Father gives me power of attorney to use his bank account.” I needed from my father a signed, witnessed and notarized document. Even so Jesus had evidence of his authority from the Father. John the Baptist was his “notary”. Then,

5:36 “...the works that the Father **has given me** to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the **Father has sent me.**” The works Jesus did bore *witness* that the Father *sent* Jesus. Again, this is agency language through and through. The works were not witness that Jesus was God, or was sent from some pre-existent state. Rather, Jesus’ works were like the works of Moses and the prophets, whose works bore witness that God sent them. Jesus healing the lame and the blind was evidence that God sent him as His agent par excellence.

5:39, 45 The scriptures, including Moses, also bear witness that the Father **sent** Jesus.

5:41 “I do not receive glory from men” – because he is doing the job of a faithful messenger. He only seeks to do the will of the One who sent him. He doesn’t deviate from his Sender’s will.

5:43 “I have come in my Father’s *name* (on the Father’s authority) and you do not receive me.

5:44 “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the **only God?**” A major reason people don’t believe Jesus is they value the honor of humans above the honor that comes from the **only** God. For Jesus, the only God is Yahweh, the God of Israel.

To sum up our third reason that an equality of divine essence is not what John 5:18 is about: Jesus’ discourse following the claim of equality with God is all *agency language*. The equality is that of granted legal authority, not of essence. Once agency and its language are understood, it is unnecessary to postulate Hellenistic concepts like equality of essence.

Review:

1. Jesus’ healed a lame man at the Pools of Bethesda near the temple mount in Jerusalem. This is a real place on our earth, uncovered in archaeological excavations. Jesus’ healing of the lame and blind are works that God did through Jesus (Acts 2:22), and serve as testimony to the identity of the Messiah. The location of the miracles on the borders of the Solomonic city of Jerusalem show that Jesus is the

promised Davidic king through whom the promised kingdom restoration comes.¹⁷ The timing of the miracles, during a Festival and on Sabbath, are a taste (“and now is”) that Jesus is the Messianic agent of the new creation, through whom all things are made new.

2. Jesus is God’s human messenger or agent “par excellence”. Agency is a prominent theme in John 5 and in all the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John refers to Jesus some 40x as being **sent**. The authority of God is vested **in** Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the one sent by God, and therefore is “equal” to God the Father in authority and purpose. Jesus says and does the will of the Father who sent him. To accept Jesus is to accept the **One** who sent him. To honor Jesus is to honor God (the Father) who sent him. Jesus the Messiah came in the name, power and authority of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The trinitarian interpretation of John 5:17-18, that in calling God his Father, Jesus was speaking of a metaphysical unity with God, and that the Jews understood him to be so speaking, is out of context with the Hebraic culture and mindset. As theological blogger [Troy Salinger](#) has written: “The relationship of Jesus to the Father is laid out in terms of divine agency not divine metaphysics...When one understands Semitic agency...No postulation of a metaphysical unity between the two is necessary.”¹⁸

This interpretation of John 5 is supported by the Judean’s attitude in John 9 concerning the healing of the blind man in Jerusalem. “Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’” (John 9:16). “...the Judeans had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be **Christ**, he was to be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:24). “We know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:24).

It is clear that God does use agents. It is worthwhile to ponder *why* God uses agents.

3. We are Jesus’ messengers or ambassadors, God’s ambassador’s through Jesus.

Jesus prayed to the Father, John 17:18: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” And John 13:20: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (cf. Matthew 10:40).

Paul concurs: 2 Corinthians 5:20 “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Messiah, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Messiah, be reconciled to God.”

Like Jesus, we don’t speak or act on our own authority, we don’t seek our own will (Jn 5:30), we don’t seek glory from men, but from the **only** God (Jn 5:41, 44).

Finally, there is great reward for being a faithful messenger **Revelation 2:26-27** ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him **I will give authority** over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, **even as I myself have received authority** from my Father.

¹⁷ The blind and the lame, far from preventing the Messiah from receiving his inheritance, become testimony to the identity of the Davidic king. Compare 2 Samuel 5:6-8.

¹⁸ <https://letthetruthcomeoutblog.wordpress.com/2019/03/18/an-analysis-of-how-dr-michael-heiser-interprets-scripture-in-relation-to-his-divine-council-concept/?fbclid=IwAR2NGUd-N88j7v54u2Xl3ozZAwGvsdjKxzgHuPSpvRfpyTe1 DrsCSkCNxTk>