

CHAPTER IV

THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST (PART II)

John 7:1-9:41

A chapter break is universally accepted at this point since we are about to be transported southward from one arena of conflict for Jesus to another that promises even greater strife. Indeed, for this Gospel account, we now bid a final farewell to the region of Galilee. John is far more concerned with significant discourse truth, 7:1-12:50, than narrative events, geographic sequence. If the chronological order here takes us from the festive Passover season of 6:4 to the subsequent Feast of Tabernacles or Booths of 7:2, then we now move forward through summer for approximately six months.

A. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES TESTIMONIES, 7:1-8:59.

The greater intensity of the following encounter between Jesus and regnant Judaism also heightens the force of His messianic claims. For this reason the ultimatum is about to be laid down by Jesus that, “unless you believe that I am He [the Christ, the Messiah of the Father], you will die in your sins,” 8:24. Here then is a melting pot, comprising all of the elements of religion, most true and false, in which the temperature continues to rise. Westcott describes this cauldron of conflict as follows:

No section in the Gospel is more evidently a transcript from life than this. It reflects a complex and animated variety of characters and feelings. Jerusalem is seen crowded at the most popular feast with men widely differing in hope and position: some eager in expectation, some immovable in prejudice. There is nothing of the calm solemnity of the private discourse, or of the full exposition of doctrine before a dignified body, such as has been given before. All is direct, personal encounter. The “brethren” of the Lord (8:3 ff.), “the Jews” (7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 48, 52, 57), “the multitudes” (7:12, 20, 31 f., 40 f., 43, 49), “the people of Jerusalem” (7:25), “the Pharisees” (7:32, 47; 8:13), “the chief-priests (*i.e.*, the Sadducean hierarchy) and Pharisees” (7:32, 45, for the first time), “Nicodemus” (7:50), “the Jews who believed him” (7:31), appear in succession in the narrative, and all with clearly marked individuality. Impatient promptings to action (7:3 ff.), vague inquiries (7:11), debates (7:12, 40 ff.), fear on this side and that (7:13, 30, 44), wonder (7:15, 46), perplexity (7:25 ff.), belief (7:31; 8:30), open hostility (7:32), unfriendly criticism (7:23 ff., 8:48 ff.), selfish belief in Christ’s Messianic dignity (8:31 ff.), follow in rapid alternation. All is full of movement, of local color, of vivid traits of conflicting classes and tendencies.¹

1. The transition from Galilee to Jerusalem, 7:1-13.

Hence freedom of movement has been relatively unhindered in the north to date, that is compared with the reports that Jesus’ disciples have related to their Master concerning the Jewish leader’s expressed antagonism to his works and words. Moreover, the Jewish leaders have probably made it plain that Jesus should not expect to have the same freedom in Judea. Perhaps these threats were intended to keep him away from

¹ B. F. Westcott, *John*, pp. 115-116.

Jerusalem. Perhaps his brethren reported this hesitation when they arrived in Jerusalem. Then the Jews were surprised to learn of Jesus brazenly teaching in the midst of the temple in the midst of the feast. This was a recipe for confrontation.

a. The delay of Jesus in Galilee, vs. 1-9.

However Jesus' delay was not born of cowardice, whatever his brethren in the flesh might have thought. Indeed their thinking at this juncture provides a stark contrast with that of their elder brother. Jesus' brothers were governed by a perspective that was singularly of this world, a plan wholly of human origin, that would attempt to gain a following by means of making an outward, showy impression. The Lord Jesus was governed by a holy divine plan of His Father in heaven that must be adhered to, which required the necessity of redemption, even his own self-offering!

(1) Relative freedom, v. 1.

“And after these things, Jesus was walking in Galilee, for he did not wish to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.” This period has not been one of isolation since Jesus has continued itinerantly “walking in Galilee,” doubtless healing and ministering wherever a crowd is prepared to listen, notwithstanding those who continued to depart from the offense of his “difficult statements,” 6:60. However Judea in the south is another matter. Perhaps Jesus has received the message, “Stay away from Jerusalem, if you want to stay alive.” Consider the animosity further described in 7:13, 19, 25, 30, 32, 44; 8:37, 40, 59.

(2) Conflict with his relatives, vs. 2-5.

It is now Autumn; the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, is due; celebration of the seven day Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem will commence five days later, and all Jewish males are required to attend (Exod. 23:14-17).

(a) Concerning the Feast of Booths, v. 2.

“Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Setting Up Tents [σκηνοπηγία, skēnopēgia], was near.” This annual celebration, Sukkos, now conducted in the inherited land of Canaan, remembered the temporary dwelling of Israel in tents or booths during transition from Egypt to Canaan. Also called the Feast of Ingathering, it most joyously followed the ingathering of the harvest and fruits, the conclusion of agricultural toil, so that there was happy remembrance as well of God's provision during the wilderness wanderings (Exod. 23:16; Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Deut. 16:13-15). In addition there were water-drawing and lamp-lighting rites later referred to in 7:37; 8:12.

(b) Concerning the works of Jesus, v. 3.

“Therefore His brothers said to Him, ‘Leave here and go into Judea so that your disciples may see the works [miracles] which you are doing.’”

These are the younger sons of Joseph and Mary, though relatives cannot be excluded, who, although rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, v. 5, yet have been confronted with undeniable wonders and remarkable ministry. Probably they consider the real test of his claims to be an open presentation of himself to Jerusalem before the nation gathered for a major feast. Perhaps the brothers are attempting to precipitate an encounter that will resolve their unbelief. Furthermore, a lost following in the region of Galilee, 6:66, along with the known fact of Jesus having additional disciples down south, makes such a transition all the more practical, at least from the perspective of political shrewdness.

(c) Concerning the wisdom of the world, v. 4.

“For no one [with an agenda such as yourself] does anything in secret; rather he seeks to be [known] in openness/public. Show/display yourself to the world.” The younger brothers may well perceive their elder brother with His best interests in mind, that is from a very earthy perspective. Nevertheless, as Ryle points out: “The false standard of an unconverted man is very manifest in this and the preceding verses. . . . The man of God remembers that true religion does not ‘cry, nor strive,’ nor court publicity.”² The child of God is not out to impress the world. For the moment, these brethren are like those who have become acquainted with Jesus, they have invoked the name of Jesus, they have professed to be related to Jesus, and yet remain blind to his real person and work. They would confess, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.” Nevertheless Jesus responds: “I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers” (Luke 13:26).

(d) Concerning the unbelief of siblings, v. 5.

“For not even His brothers were believing in Him.” So the author John acknowledges that the preceding recommendation was carnally motivated (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35; cf. Acts 1:14). Whatever Messianic hopes the brothers may have held, their vision of Jesus presenting his claims to Jerusalem was based on worldly expectations, and mere human identification. They did indeed believe in him, in his family seniority, in his remarkable abilities, in his ethical purity, in his faithfulness as a Jew, but not as Jesus desired. How seemingly inexplicable it is that, even like Judas, those so close to Jesus could yet remain so distant from him. Familial or denominational relationships do not guarantee the transmission of spiritual blessings.

(3) Explanation to his relatives. 6-9.

Only now do we hear Jesus speak, that is since his ministry at the Capernaum synagogue six months ago. And what a different perspective we

² Ryle, *John*, II, p. 9.

receive in response to his brethren in the flesh, that is the driving force of the will of His Father, the terms of His coming to earth as the Lamb of God (Heb. 10:5-10), and especially the appointed hour of His self-offering, 10:17-18. He will not be distracted by lesser proposals that cannot possibly deal with the root problem of the human condition. Always before Him is, as He puts it, “My time.”

(a) Concerning his contrasting ministry, v. 6.

“Therefore Jesus said to them [His brothers], ‘My [right/suitable] time [καιρός, kairos] is not yet here/present, but the your time is always ready.’ Here is a favorite expression of Jesus, “My time,” also v. 8, or “My/His/the/this hour,” ὥρα, hōra, 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1.³ Here we see a major distinction between Jesus Christ and mankind in general. Man is conscious of making his own independent decisions, going his own way, whereas the Son of God was always conscious of doing His Father’s will.

To his brothers Jesus makes this distinction clear. “My times are in the hand of My Father; My whole earthly ministry is committed to His divine will; there is a right time for Me to go to the Feast, and my destiny in Jerusalem as God’s Lamb. Your times are in your own hands, quite apart from heavenly direction; you go your own way because you do not have that relationship with the Father that I do. But when converted (Acts 1:14), then they will speak of “my time,” under the Father’s guidance. Peter experienced this transformation from spiritual vagrancy to spiritual glorification, 21:18-19, as did Paul (I Tim. 1:13-14; II Tim. 4:6-8).

(b) Concerning his controversy with the world, v. 7.

“The world is not able to hate you, but it hates Me because I witness/testify concerning it that its works are evil [πονηρός, ponēros, 17:15].” Again, as in the preceding verse, Jesus describes the vast difference between “you” and “Me” though now with greater clarity. The “world” here is very comprehensive; it includes Adam’s race as a whole, even the Jewish people and Jesus’ relatives in the flesh, yet not the eleven disciples, 17:6, 9, 14-16. With this exception, they all have commonality with the world, and as a whole “hate” [μισέω, miseō] Jesus Christ. But, many would say, such an idea is preposterous; this language of “hatred” is extreme. Surely the world in general has great

³ D. A. Carson suggests that while ὥρα, hōra, in 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1 looks forward to Christ’s hour of glorification, here καιρός, kairos in 6:6, 8, merely anticipates His attendance at the impending Feast of Tabernacles. *John*, pp. 307-308. See Morris, *John*, pp. 397-399, for an analysis of this perspective, who suggests caution here in making too fine a distinction. Further, while the life of Christ as a whole incorporates further concluding ministry in the northern Galilean region, for John, his record now takes us to Judea for a continuous account of southern ministry culminating in the cross. Also consider that here Jesus distinctively contrasts “My time” of destiny with “your time.” However His time incorporates the ambiguity of departing for both the Feast and His time of destined atonement as God’s Lamb.

respect for Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, it does, and it is of the nature of Herod's deceptive desire to worship Jesus (Matt. 2:8)! The world is like Judas who is happy to be in close proximity to Jesus, and yet refuses to submit to being under Him, and in the same vein it regards Him as being dispensable. This same attitude of the world is described in Psalm 2:2-3 where it refuses to bow to the holy reign of Jesus Christ. Notice the same duplicity in vs. 19-20 where, on the one hand, the crowd is offended, indignant at Jesus' charge that it plots to kill Him. Then, on the other hand, in vs. 1, 25, it seems common knowledge that indeed plans are afoot to kill Jesus.

But Jesus is not backward in explaining the reason for this hatred of Him by the world. It is because, "I witness/testify concerning it that its works are evil." As J. C. Ryle puts it: "In short, they [the Jews and Gentiles] could have tolerated His opinions if He would only have spared their sins."⁴ Here is brought forth the important truth that Jesus Christ has come as a surgeon of souls whose ministry is both diagnostic in a manner that transcends that of Moses, and surgically remedial in a manner that contrasts with Moses impotence in this realm. He must first search for the disease before removing it, and this is a procedure that man finds repulsive. A spiritual colonoscopy is not to his liking! Yet the New Testament is full of incidents where Jesus becomes a sore point with mankind. The first words of Jesus in Mark are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent [of sin] and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15); the Passover crowd felt the sting, John 2:23-25; Nicodemus felt the sting (John 3:10); the world of dark evil felt the sting of the light (John 3:19-21); the woman at the well felt the sting, John 4:17-19; the scribes and Pharisees felt the sting (Matt. 23:1-36); the Sermon on the Mount stimulated the sting (Matt. 5:20, 21-22, 27-28, 31-32; 6:1-4, 16-21, 31-32; 7:3-5, 11, 21-23). Simply study the life of Christ and you will feel the sting, as did Peter when he cried out, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

But what does Jesus do when men, with all honesty, acknowledge the sting of His exposure of their disease? Does He cast them aside in their agony? Does He tell them of their consignment to judgment and perdition? No, a thousand times no! When we cry out in pain at the true diagnosis of our soul's condition, then Jesus promises to perform remedial surgery. The disease is removed; the soul is cleansed; new life is given that results in our becoming dead to sin and alive to righteousness. In Mark 1:15, Jesus not only said "repent," but also "believe in the gospel." Did Jesus cast Peter aside as requested? No! Rather he responded, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men" Luke 5:10).

⁴ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 3.

- (c) Concerning his ministry by divine appointment, v. 8.

“You yourselves go up to the feast; I Myself do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet been fulfilled/come to fulfillment.” Remember that Jesus has associated his brethren with the world, that is He has indicated there is affinity between them and the world, v. 6. The implication is that the advice of His brethren is similarly of this world, and that being the case, He has no intention of following such a path. Whatever men may say concerning fear or hesitancy, His course is determined by His Father, and for the moment, he must remain in the region of Galilee. In the Gospels, there is not one instance of Jesus, in listening to human advice frequently given, yielding to it in such a way that he appears to change direction from an earlier declared course. Ryle adds: “True Christians should remember that, like their Master on this occasion, they and worldly men cannot work well and act and move together. They will often find it so. Their principles are different. Their reasons and motives of action are different. They will often find that “two cannot walk together except they are agreed” (Amos 3:3).⁵

- (d) Concerning his obedience to the Father’s will, v. 9.

“Having said these things, He Himself remained in Galilee.” Presumably Jesus was accompanied by the twelve disciples at this time of obscurity. On the other hand, the brethren remained mystified at their elder brother’s rejection of seeming good common sense. Nevertheless, they take His advice, and perhaps inadvertently prepare the way, stimulating curiosity amongst the Jews, v. 11.

- b. The departure of Jesus for Jerusalem, vs. 10-13.

Probably an aspect of the life of Jesus that is neglected at this point concerns the source of His conviction that His life is precisely ordered, quite apart from the sway of men. The answer is most likely revealed in Jesus’ habit of praying either alone or with the disciples (Matt. 14:13, 23; 17:1; 26:36; Mark 6:31; John 6:15). Consider His comment in prayer, “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).

- (1) His delayed private departure, v. 10.

“However when His brethren went up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not openly, but as in private/incognito [κρυπτός, *kruptos*].” If we accept the chronology of A. T. Robertson,⁶ then Jesus is about to depart to Jerusalem for the last time.⁷ According to Mark 9:30, having delivered a boy

⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶ A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, pp. 107-113.

⁷ William Hendriksen comments that Jesus’ going up to Jerusalem was “true in this case even in a literal sense (actually *ascending* from 680 feet below sea-level near the Sea of Galilee to 2,500 feet above sea-level, the altitude of the Holy City), but ever true in a religious sense.” *John*, p. 122.

with an unclean spirit, “from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it.” Then, “when the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). In seeking refuge in Samaria, Jesus is rebuffed, and “they went on to another village” (Luke 9:56). At this time there is to be no repetition of the attempt at Bethsaida to “take Him by force to make Him king” (6:15). Events must be kept in check and not allowed to get out of hand for the offering of God’s real Passover Lamb is not scheduled until at least six months hence.

(2) His desired arrival by the Jews, v. 11.

“Therefore the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and they were saying, ‘Where is that one?’” Obviously the ministry of Jesus in the north has become the center of heightened discussion in the south amongst the Jewish leaders (1:19). Some pilgrims have cautiously testified concerning personal healing, of tasting Jesus’ bread and fish, of His teaching ministry and messianic claims. Also the brethren have probably been investigated. Hence the religious establishment is threatened. They have not forgotten an earlier occasion when they charged Jesus with sabbath breaking and blasphemy, and sought to kill Him (5:18), even as now (7:1). Has He now become such a pariah that even His name is taboo? It seems He is irreverently sought as “that unmentionable fellow.” Certainly Jesus is sought and esteemed among men for a multitude of reasons, as v. 12 clearly indicates.

(3) His controversy with the Jerusalem crowd, v. 12.

“And many were grumbling [γογγυσμός, gongusmos] concerning Him amongst the crowds. On the one hand there were those saying that ‘He is a good man.’ But on the other hand others were saying, ‘No, but He deceives/leads astray [πλανῶ planaō] the crowd.’” Actually there were four groups involved here. First, there were those grumbling/murmuring-/whispering with admiration; this man had an aura of authentic godliness about Him. Second, there were those grumbling with criticism, especially because Jesus challenged status quo Judaism, particularly its carnality and hypocrisy. Third, there were those too timid and indifferent to say anything. They were not going to stick their necks out in a matter of controversy. Fourth, there was the little flock of believing disciples, likewise silent, unwilling to testify, perhaps with the exception of Nicodemus, vs. 50-52. They have some faith in Jesus of Nazareth, but a void remains.

How true it is that Jesus Christ is and continues to be the divider of mankind, even their souls (Matt. 10:34-36; John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; II Cor. 2:15-16). There is no peace between light and darkness (John 1:5; 3:19-21). But further, we see here that a man needs not only conviction of truth, but also the enlivening Spirit of God (Acts 2:14; 4:8, 13, 20, 31; I Thess. 1:5).

(4) His conflict with the Jews, v. 13.

“However no one was speaking openly concerning Him because of fear of the Jews.” Opponents of Jesus would hardly be restrained from expressing their opinions. Hence, it is those who, to some degree, are favorably disposed towards Jesus who are pressured into keeping silent. Organized religion, especially when it cooperates with the secular state, cannot tolerate free speech, though as we are about to see, Jesus Christ could not be kept quiet in the same manner as were the people. Many a sixteenth century Reformer experienced the suppressive power of organized religion, on pain of ridicule, excommunication, or even death, as did John Bunyan in the seventeenth century (16:1-3).

2. The discourse concerning Jesus relationship with the Father, 7:14-36.

The controversy resulting from Jesus’ healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath is about to recur (5:1-18; cf. 7:23), even though it took place over a year ago. That incident was a particular trigger with regard to ongoing conflict over the Sabbath, insofar as the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were concerned, that had left an indelible mark. On that previous occasion Jesus had boldly asserted His exalted relationship with His Father in heaven. “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (5:18). Further, Jesus had then charged the Jews with “not having His Word abiding in you” and “not having the love of God in them” (5:38:42). Such stinging condemnation and further reports from the north have not been forgotten. The resolve to murder Jesus has only heightened, v. 1.

a. The education of Jesus by the Father, vs. 14-24.

Here Jesus continues to remain in full control concerning His revelation of Himself. He is not discovered; rather He again presents Himself to the Jerusalem throng, according to His Father’s will, at a most opportune time, well knowing that He has increasingly become “the talk of the town.” In such a sophisticated religious setting, no ordinary Galilean could easily gain the attention of this knowledgeable, particularly masculine, festive assembly (1:46; 7:41).

(1) The source of His education – the Father, vs. 14-18.

The Jew placed the matter of education at an extremely high level, though there was no sharp distinction between the sacred and the secular as is common today. All of the particulars of life, whether in worship or service, subsumed under the knowledge of God. Hence at the heart of Jewish teaching was theology. Thus the source of Jewish education was the environment of either the Temple or synagogue under rabbinic direction, the heart of this office involving teaching. Now Jesus, the low status Nazarene, has previously displayed His teaching credentials in the region of Galilee to astonished crowds (Matt. 7:28-29), and has informally been recognized as “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher)” (1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 6:25). But has He publicly, definitively introduced Himself to Jerusalem in the forum of the

Temple at a major feast? Not according to John. Alford suggests that this presentation here is Jesus' first formal, public *teaching* in the south, which accounts for the wonder of the Jews at this time.⁸ Certainly His self-revelation of 7:14-39; 8:12-9:41, as John presents it, is both unparalleled and climactic in terms of its concentration on Jesus' exalted personal claims.

(a) It is bold, v. 14.

“But when it was already the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and [commenced] teaching.” Perhaps He delayed coming to Jerusalem so as to gain the maximum effect. Further, He desires presentation while avoiding premature coronation. However, here Jesus assertively, unapologetically assumes the role of a Rabbi. But what does He teach? Here Jesus Himself probably declares Himself to be God's Manna from heaven (6:32-38, 47-58), this time in the heart of Jerusalem, in contrast with John the Baptist's earlier announcement beyond Jordan (1:28-29). According to the emphases of the author John, surely this would include *who* He is, *where* He has come from, *why* He has come, and *what* His relationship is with His Father, all by means of Scripture exposition. Doubtless there were challenges from the Jews, vs. 15, 20.

(b) It is impressive, v. 15.

“Therefore the Jews were showing astonishment/-amazement [in] saying, ‘How [does] this man know learning [γράμματα, grammata, letters, formal education, Scripture exegesis, cf. Luke 23:38; John 5:47; II Tim. 3:15], not having learned [under rabbinical tutelage]?’” Although Jesus is known as a Galilean, having never sat at the feet of a Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) or attended an Ivy League rabbinical seminary, nevertheless He does not teach as if He were some country bumkin. There is something divinely symphonic about the Incarnate Word proclaiming the Written Word. Yet the Jewish leaders are deaf to this sound coming from a mere “self-taught enthusiast.”⁹ Following Pentecost, Jesus' uneducated disciples will similarly confound the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem on account of “the confidence of Peter and John,” in spite of their being “uneducated [ἀγράμματος, agrammatos] and un-trained [ιδιώτης, idiōtēs],” due to the fact of their “having been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). But the unavoidable question remaining on the lips of the crowd concerns the source of Jesus' profound understanding, his superior education.

⁸ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I, p. 700. Morris adds: “This seems to indicate that many of them had never heard Jesus teach before this, and indeed, John has not recorded any previous teaching of Jesus in Jerusalem. . . . [M]any of His audience on this occasion would be pilgrims from centers where Jesus had never been.” *John*, p. 404. Note that 2:23-25 seems to focus on signs rather than public teaching. Similarly concerning 5:1-47 there is controversy over a sign and resultant dialogue, yet no apparent formal temple presentation.

⁹ Westcott, *John*, p. 118.

- (c) It is heavenly, v. 16.

“Therefore Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not mine, but of He who sent Me.’” Knowing the thoughts of His congregation, Jesus is quick to reveal the source of His doctrine, disclaim personal ability, yet, at the same time, uphold His unique relationship to His Father. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the foundation of the best education, and Jesus Christ is His teaching Mediator. Jerusalem religion provided education about God from man, indeed many men (Matt. 15:9; 23:5). Jesus provides superior education about God from God. Yes, He has not attended a school of the prophets on earth, a rabbinic academy. Rather His learning has come from the very bosom of God in heaven (1:18), before He came to earth. Jesus was educated in the most exalted of all halls of learning; He graduated summa cum laude, with the highest praise of His Father. Here is the source of the greatest education opportunity of all time. It is the School of Christ since He is the Father’s only appointed tutor. His curriculum is exclusively the will of His Father.

- (d) It is verifiable, v. 17.

“If anyone should will [desire] to do His will, he shall know whether it is of God or [whether] I speak from Myself.”¹⁰ How then does one enroll in this School/Academy of Christ? Jesus immediately provides qualification concerning admittance into His divine college, under His direction and instruction. It is not by means of sitting a Scholastic Aptitude Test in the Word of God, but rather obedience to the author of that revelation, the God of the Word. Attendance at the school of Christ requires the initial qualification of consecration, obedience, before verification of entrance is obtained. God requires submission first; understanding follows as a consequence. Jesus is probably contrasting the rabbinical esteem for knowledge about God with the priority of subjection to that God. God is not some object who is to be submitted to human scrutiny and dissection. Rather a disciple must first yield to God before entrance into Christ’s school is granted. Only following submission will there be revelation. We do not come to God with a certain grade point average for qualification, but rather humble surrender, an attitude of heart, a willingness to do the Father’s will. To such people, not mere scholastics, there is revealed the authenticity of Christ in relation to His Father as the Savior (Matt. 16:16-19). So Ryle wisely comments:

We learn from these words how greatly they err who profess to be waiting till their mental difficulties are removed before they become decided Christians. They must change their plan. They must understand that knowledge comes through human obedience as well as through the

¹⁰ The KJV translation reads: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,” though it is not accurate and thus misses the point. The heart of the matter is a willingness to do the Father’s will, not simply doing it.

intellect. . . . We learn furthermore, that God tests men's sincerity by making obedience part of the process by which religious knowledge is obtained. Are we willing to do God's will so far as we know it?¹¹

The Jews were at fault in this regard, so that for all of their knowledge they were blind to Christ.

(e) It is theocentric, v. 18.

“Whoever is speaking from himself is seeking his own glory. But whoever is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, this One is true [authentic] and unrighteousness is not in Him.” By way of contrast concerning the principle of v. 17, Jesus Christ declares His priority of commitment being given to the glorification of the Father. The Jews were self-oriented, ego-centered in their religious pursuits, whereas Jesus was wholly Father-oriented. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus has come, not to do His own will, but the will of His Father, that person will have come to the truth that He is the Son of God. Further he will then confess that Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of that Father, and therefore He is void of unrighteousness, even as is His Father. Ultimately, as Alford points out, Christ alone has purity of motive in seeking “the glory of the One who sent Him,”¹² especially since He alone has seen the Father and come from Him (3:13, 31; 5:43-44; 6:38, 46). Hence to know the Father, true faith will look to Christ and not men.

(2) The subject of His education - hypocrisy, vs. 19-24.

It is a principle in education that, to be effective, the teacher must commence at the level of the student, where he is at. A further principle concerns the likely necessity of some unlearning before learning can commence. Both principles are employed by Jesus at this time. The audience is largely intoxicated with Mosaic formality that is divorced from heart righteousness. Hence Jesus first identifies this hypocrisy as the starting point. At the same time he must commence with scraping away the barnacles of soul suffocating, hypocritical external conformity, and this can be a painful process. Of course here students can repudiate their teacher if they object; indeed most of them do. Here this privileged Jewish people wants to eliminate its most qualified instructor, though it does so at its own peril, 8:21, 24. However, such rebellion is just as perilous for Gentile classes.

(a) Hypocrisy and the law, vs. 19-20.

The thought of self-congratulation that Jesus has denounced in v. 18 is closely connected with the matter of hypocrisy. The person who is self-opinionated, man-centered, at the same time desires the favourable

¹¹ Ryle, *John*, II, pp. 22-23.

¹² Alford, *Greek Testament*, I, p. 700.

opinion and applause of others. A reality checkup of the murky depths of the heart is not in mind. Hence the accomplishment of a favorable external rating requires the embellishment of self according to personal conniving, a cosmetic makeover in spite of internal evidence to the contrary, a cover-up. Hence, in knowing the human heart, Jesus fearlessly strips away this external pretense to reveal a shameful ugliness, the odor of corruption. He cannot suffer religious forgery (Matt. 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). The result is an exposure that causes pain, embarrassment, and an angry protest.

1) The charge of rampant hypocrisy, v. 19.

“Has not Moses given to you the Law, and yet none of you do/keep [ποιέω, poieo] the Law? Why are you seeking to kill Me?” As the Son of God, Jesus does not merely read faces, but souls. Hence He is aware that while the Jewish rulers were passionate about learning and detailed discussion of the Law, about their public reading of it at this festive season (Deut. 31:10-13), and they boasted in being its custodian (Rom. 2:17), nevertheless they were less interested in a heart desire for its fulfillment in their own lives. Inner cleanliness was unimportant because of inner selfish conniving. This was in spite of the fact that David testified: “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). Paul made the same complaint (Rom. 2:23-25), as does the Lord Jesus. Consequently, the Son of God does not expose some seeming modest infringement of the Law. Rather he thrusts the scalpel deep with the accusation that, at that very moment, the hearts of the Jewish leaders, well represented at that moment, were consumed with murderous intent, that is transgression of the sixth commandment. Remember that if any amongst Israel were said to be paragons of Mosaic virtue, it would have been, the members of the Sanhedrin, the chief priests, and Pharisees, v. 32.

2) The response of blatant hypocrisy, v. 20.

“The crowd answered, ‘You have [are possessed by] a demon! Who is seeking to kill You?’” Jesus’ accusation has been understood as shocking, even blasphemous. Probably the crowd, in general, respond somewhat defensively, at this juncture, concerning their leaders. Moreover, even the common people feel the pain. Hence the knee-jerk reaction is phoney righteous indignation. Surely Jesus of Nazareth has lost his mind; He is demon possessed (8:48; 10:20; cf. Matt. 12:24; Mark 3:21). Here especially is revealed the reason for Jesus’ proclivity for causing a division among men. His surgical analysis of the human condition is such that it causes many to prefer a state of denial rather than admit to the awful truth about man’s profound corruption. Such is present day society, tolerant of an ethical teacher, but intolerant of Jesus’ exposure of hidden decadence.

(b) Hypocrisy and the Sabbath, vs. 21-23.

In spite of the insulting response that Jesus has just encountered, He is not deterred in pressing home with even greater force his fundamental complaint of hypocrisy. Consequently, the school of Jesus is not your average classroom, vs. 14-16. You enter prepared to be stripped naked of pretense; you are willing to make confession, not maintain denial; you yield up any thought of protest and instead silently bow without complaint; you acknowledge that Jesus Christ thoroughly knows your heart so that, in helplessness, your only hope in Him is that of mercy. In terms of Jewish conformity to the Law, the quintessential matter of compliance concerned Sabbath keeping. Hence Sabbath-breaking was deemed a most serious transgression. This is proved by the fact that ever since Jesus' healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath over a year ago, and His vigorous defense of this act of mercy, 5:2-23, He has been marked out as an enemy of Israel worthy of death, 5:18. However for Jesus, the Sabbath issue presented a perfect example of his concern expressed in vs. 17-19. The minutia imposed with regard to external Sabbath keeping was stifling, while heart interest in the rest of faith and godward affections was incidental. So Jesus raises another sore point. And how many more could he raise?

1) A reminder of a former Sabbath healing, v. 21.

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I did/performed one work [5:1-15] and you all are marveling/are amazed [θαυμάζω, thaumazō].” Knowing the hearts of his audience, Jesus understands the considerable degree to which the healing at the pool of Bethesda, of over a year ago, remains a bone of contention with the festive crowd, but especially the Jewish leaders, vs. 15, 20. However the “astonishment” here is more than mere wonder; it is shock in the form of moral indignation that results from the judgment of Jesus for his serious infraction of sabbatarianism. Now to bring a moral judgment against the Son of God is a grave course to take, especially since it is a defensive reaction to his penetrating judgment, vs. 19-20. However, Jesus now responds with a lesson in judgment, v. 24, a whipping in biblical rebuttal, that will not easily be forgotten.

2) A reminder of present Sabbath circumcision, v. 22.

“On account of [with reference to] this [monumental biblical *faux pas*, allow Me to point out that] Moses has given to you circumcision, not because it is from Moses but [originally] from the fathers, and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man.” First, consider circumcision which originated with Abraham (Gen. 17:10-11) and not the later Mosaic dispensation. Certainly it was incorporated into the Mosaic law (Lev. 12:3). Probably Jerusalem rings with the sound of Moses' name and his mandate for circumcision. It being part of Torah was what mattered. But what

of the preceding authority of Abraham concerning circumcision when there was no formal Sabbath? Thus circumcision rightly trumps the later Mosaic order requiring Sabbath rest. Thus you are correct to circumcise on the Sabbath; this should present no dilemma. However this admits of something rising above, indeed being more important than the Mosaic strictures concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. The Sabbath activity of the mohel, the specialist flesh cutter, proves this. Surely his labor is a good and necessary work. Could there be other things that rise above your rigid, unmerciful sabbatarianism?

3) A rebuttal of the charge of transgression, v. 23.

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the Law of Moses is not broken, are you angry [χολάω, cholaō, choleric, full of gall] with Me because I made a whole man well on the Sabbath?” Here then is not Sabbath nullification or Sabbath modification, but Sabbath exposition and justification (Mark 2:27). The a fortiori logic is compelling and humiliating. Circumcision involves merely one physical member, whereas Jesus’ ministry of healing makes an entire man ὕγιης, hugiēs, “whole/well/sound,” and probably in much more than his flesh. Further, the man who was healed after thirty-eight years was surely circumcised. Then by way of comparison with Jesus, what good did this esteemed rite do for him? Here is further proof that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5).

(c) Hypocrisy and righteous judgment, v. 24.

“Do not judge [stop judging] according to appearance [ὄψις, opsis, external perception], but judge with righteous judgment/just judgment [κρίσιν, κρίνετε, krisin, krinete].” It appears that a whole spirit of judgmentally pervaded Jerusalem at this time; it was a natural fruit of legalism, especially with regard to sabbatarianism, that is a hawkish watching of one another for minute infractions. However, perversion of the opposite extreme is also here addressed, that of Christ’s other injunction, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged” (Matt. 7:1). Here then the call is for judgement with discrimination. This author well remembers working on his automobile with his young daughter watching. He told her not to touch anything. Then something did go wrong, and he concluded, from the evidence as he perceived it, that she had indeed interfered. He scolded her. Later, in understanding what had really happened, he realized that she was completely innocent. My judgment was totally wrong, lacking caution and discrimination.

- 1) We judge people positively and negatively because of outward conformity.
- 2) We judge people positively and negatively because of some outward nonconformity.

- 3) We judge other people externally while judging ourselves internally.
- 4) We judge other people with righteous indignation while judging ourselves with mercy and concession.
- 5) We judge other people harshly while judging ourselves softly.
- 6) We judge other people minutely, severely while judging ourselves with a blind eye.

Similarly David lacked this discrimination when, while indignant at Nathan the prophet's illustration of injustice, he was blind to his own flagrant injustice. He needed to be told, "You are the man!" (II Sam. 12:7). The parable of the unmerciful servant illustrates unjust judgment, that is mercy received did not become mercy distributed (Matt. 18:23-30). So the scribes and Pharisees judged according to the "outside of the cup and of the dish," or the external decoration of tombs, not internal uncleanness (Matt. 23:25-28).

But the worst act of blind judgment arises when we judge the Lord Jesus incorrectly, even as the Jews did in Jerusalem. This is the supreme, the most damning injustice of all. Here Jesus declares, "You are angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?" v. 23. How incredibly foolish we are when we judge the Judge, instead of seeking His pardon.

b. The origination of Jesus from the Father, vs. 25-31.

After such a weighty, heart-searching, indeed humiliating lesson on discriminating as opposed to hypocritical judgment concerning sabbatarianism, in the school of Jesus, vs. 14-24, there may have been a pause for reflection amongst the surprised students, the sophisticates of Jerusalem. However the Teacher is able to hear the interaction which focuses on the vital question, "From where has this Jesus come?" The answers may have included Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethany, the associates of John the Baptist, the sect of the Essenes near the Dead Sea, etc. Enquire of the world today from where it thinks Jesus Christ originated, and probably the answer at best will merely be Palestine. For Jesus, all of this is so void of the real profound truth.

(1) The people contemplate Jesus Christ, vs. 25-27.

Here we see the vain efforts of the religious man, as epitomized by the Jerusalemite, v. 25, when he attempts to find God and come to his own determination about Jesus Christ. However Jesus Christ is not who we think He is; He is not what we discover about Him, and especially from a front page article in Time Magazine. Rather Jesus Christ is who He is revealed to be by His Father. Earthly geographic factors are of little importance.

(a) As the man, v. 25.

“Therefore some of the Jerusalemites [Mark 1:5] were saying, ‘This man is not he whom they are seeking to kill? [is He? Yes He is.]’” It is the Jerusalem intelligentsia, knowing the city intrigue, that rises up with indignant surprise, as if to say, “So this is the man we have heard so much about, especially from Galilee, as well as the plotting here of over a year, 5:18, that intends to eliminate him as a Messianic pretender!” Here are none of the more respectful terms of address that were often employed in the north, such as “king” (John 6:15); “Rabbi” (John 6:25); “Lord” (Matt. 8:6); “Teacher” (Matt. 8:19) even by a scribe. Rather Jesus is simply a “man,” an out-of-town wonder. But there will be more genuine esteem from “the crowd,” v. 31, the common people including festival visitors.

(b) As the Christ, v. 26.

“And behold, He is speaking openly/publicly/unchallenged [παρρησία, *parrhēsia*, v. 4; 18:20] and they [the Jewish religious leaders] are saying nothing to Him. Could it be the rulers really know that this man is the Christ? [No, surely not.]” Past experience had taught that religious usurpers ought normally to be led away captive. But this situation is unusual, especially the popularity of Jesus amongst the common people that has been encouraged by John the Baptist. There are strong claims being put forward, by followers of this Jesus, that He is the Messiah, especially concerning where he will come from, and where Jesus has come from. Here then is the reason for cowardly hesitancy that schemes in the dark. The suggestion of a possible change of mind is fleeting indeed. However, at the same time, here is “restraining power put on our Lord’s enemies at this juncture (cf. v. 30).”¹³ And further, there is divine allowance for Jesus to give substantial, unrestricted ministry that subsequent centuries of Christians would learn about.

(c) As the Nazarene, v. 27.

“However we know from where this man [is from]. But whenever the Christ may come, no one knows from where He is [coming].” So the Jerusalemites take up the disputed matter of Jesus’ origin and arrive at two misguided conclusions.

- 1) Jesus’ earthly residence is known to be Nazareth (Matt. 21:11; John 19:19), and probably Bethlehem as His birthplace. Before Jesus arrived for the present festival, he was the talk of the town, which gossip was fueled by His brethren. However this only reckons with carnal perception of this world, which matter Jesus will shortly address as being completely shortsighted.

¹³ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 34.

- 2) Messiah's coming is believed to be incognito, in spite of Micah 5:2; cf. Matthew 2:4-6. The Jews commonly believed that his town of origin would be unknown, shrouded in mystery. He would even Himself be unconscious of His calling *until* formally being anointed by Elijah.¹⁴ But they already know a lot about Jesus' Galilean reputation. Thus this claimant could not be the Messiah.

(2) The self-revelation of Jesus Christ, vs. 28-29.

(a) I have come from the Father, v. 28.

“Therefore Jesus cried/shouted [κράζω, *krazō*, cf. 1:15; 7:37; 12:44, onomatopoeic, as a crow] out in the temple, teaching and saying, ‘You both know me and you know from where I am from; and I have not come of Myself. But the One who has sent me is true, whom you do not know.’” Here is a major proclamation of Jesus that aims at reaching as many of the Jews in the temple precincts; here is a most significant truth about Jesus by Jesus. Here is good news about Himself and bad news about His sophisticated audience. “Yes, you correctly know of my earthly origin; yes, I am a Galilean. But my origin is not really about My earthly beginning, even at Bethlehem. That misses the point. What matters is that I have come from the Father, the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. My focus is not to be upon my birth, a transitional matter, but eternity past in My Father's bosom, the conversation there, and His commissioning of Me to come and save the sinners He appoints for Me to save. The fact is you do not know My Father, and the reason is that you do not know Me! I am His perfect expression (14:9). Do you wish to know the Father? Then come and know Me!” What a bold, solemn accusation this is concerning a congregation of people so intensely religious, and yet so void of God.

(b) I know the Father, v. 29.

“I know Him, because I am from Him, even that one who sent Me.” Here is Jesus emphasizing a truth, without the slightest restraint, that He has repeatedly taught, even a year ago in Jerusalem (4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18). As Morris well states,

the three expressions that come together here, “I know Him,” “I am from Him,” and “He sent me,” sum up a great deal of Johannine theology: knowledge, origin, and mission.¹⁵

Of many of the choicest Old Testament saints, it could be said that they did genuinely “know God,” as with Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and David. But that was because God came to them all in their sinful frailty and need. But here concerning Jesus, it is not that God has come to Him in His need; rather His uniqueness is that He has come from God, His

¹⁴ Refer to *Barrett, John*, p. 266; *Carson*, pp. 317-318; *Morris, John*, 411-412.

¹⁵ *Morris, Reflections on John*, p. 270.

very bosom in heaven, with all of the fullness of God (Col. 2:9), because of our sinful frailty and need!

(3) The people constrained by Jesus Christ's self-revelation, vs. 30-31.

How then does man respond to this wondrous revelation, especially religious man? In one of two ways, with no middle ground in between. Either he responds with the full force of his self-righteousness and determines to do away with this Man from his personal universe, or he bows down before this Jesus, come from God the Father, and confesses as did Thomas, "[You are] my Lord and My God" (20:28). Either we attempt to expel Him or we submit to His sovereign, holy claims! There cannot be neutrality.

(a) His power overcomes His opponents, v. 30.

"Therefore they were seeking to seize [πιάζω, *piazō*] Him, and no man laid hands on Him, because His hour had not yet come." Probably enraged at the charge of vs. 28-29, namely that the Jerusalemites did not know the Father, the God of Abraham, while Jesus did, the plotting of some of these inflamed hearts seems about to burst forth with physical intensity. Yet at the same time there is something holding them back. There is the embarrassing fact that many presently believe in Jesus; there is also Jesus' authoritative presence, His holy demeanor; but there is also divine restraint, employed according to God's sovereign decree, that man is not only unable to overcome (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1) but also actually, unwittingly accomplishes His will (Gen. 50:20). The hour of Jesus' appointed atonement governs the affairs of men and not contrariwise (Gal. 4:4-5; cf. 18:6; I Chron. 16:21-22). This world is not under the direction of mindless randomness, but the wise and righteous dominion of the Almighty Jehovah. So His Son administers this same sovereign oversight, even in the midst of men, but particularly in the saving of those He came to save.

(b) His signs convince some of them, v. 31.

"But many of the crowd believed in Him and they were saying, 'When the Christ has come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man performs? [will he? No He will not].'" Certainly the explicit nature of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah is not in dispute. Here also is an indication that a multitude of signs, additional to the healing of the lame man, 5:1-17, was the common topic of conversation during this festival occasion. As Ryle points out, "more signs" here "probably means not only more in number, but 'greater' in character."¹⁶ But what of the quality of "faith" expressed here? It is of the lower classes rather than the leaders and Jerusalemites. As Carson puts it, "Faith based on signs is not strongly encouraged (2:11, 23; 4:48; *etc.*), though it is better

¹⁶ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 40.

than nothing (10:38).¹⁷ Probably this faith was little better than that which was earlier expressed at a Passover celebration (2:23-25), to which Jesus would not respond with acceptance.

c. The imminent departure of Jesus to the Father, vs. 32-36.

So the Jewish rulers, having learned that “many of the crowd believed in Him,” are moved to action that will assert their coveted authority over an intolerable threat. As in civil politics, so in carnal religious politics, holding on to power and privilege and prestige can become a relentless pursuit that qualifies for the title of despotism and tyranny. Denominational politics have often involved such conflict where personal aggrandizement nullifies the quality of Christ-like humility. Such struggles will also evidence a blindness to spiritual priorities that eventually leads to the manifestation of unbridled bigotry. Such is the case here.

(1) Jesus is subject to the oppression of bigotry, v. 32.

“The Pharisees having heard the crowd grumbling/ murmuring/debating [γογγύζω, gonguzō] these things about Him, the chief priests and the Pharisees sent attendants/officers in order that they might seize/arrest Him.” The two classes within the Jewish rulers here are in full agreement. The Pharisees report of the scandal and the more aloof chief priests issue the decree. However the officers are sent alone to carry out the dirty work. Of course this action has been planned for some time. But now the positive response of much of the crowd to Jesus necessitates this popularity being nipped in the bud. There is a swelling, threatening chorus, easily heard, that must not get out of hand. However it should be noticed that the convincing evidence of signs, which the crowd confesses to be compelling, is of little importance to the Jewish leaders, biblical scholars though they be. The reason is that they are simply bigots! Bigotry means intolerance, unreasonable prejudice, stubborn resistance in the face of truth, self-imposed blindness to the facts, for the preservation of a personal cause, come what may! Never was a man subject to bigotry as much as was Jesus Christ.

By way of illustration, consider William Tyndale, the English Reformer, who demonstrated how disciples of Christ are likewise subject to bigotry. He translated most of the Bible by 1530 from Greek and Hebrew into English, from which our King James Version is derived. Though he fled to Germany in exile, yet he was ultimately arrested in Brussels and charged, “with having infringed the imperial decree which forbids anyone to teach that faith alone justifies.” He defended himself at his trial at which the procurator general stated, “Truly, this was a good, learned, and pious man,” yet through religious influence was found guilty of “erroneous, rash, ill-sounding, dangerous, scandalous, heretical propositions.” At the scene of his punishment he was stripped of his clerical robes before a bishop, shaved, and expelled from the ministry. He then stated, “I call God to record, that I have never altered one syllable of His Word. Nor would do this day, if all the pleasures, honors, and riches of earth might be given me.” His final words

¹⁷ Carson, *John*, p. 319.

were, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes,” after which he was strangled at the stake and then burned.¹⁸ There is a close parallel here between the servant and his Master.

- (2) Bigotry is subject to the sovereignty of Jesus, vs. 33-34.

How triumphant the Lord Jesus is over this blindness of man and amidst the planning of his murder. He is the complete Master of these circumstances. There is not the slightest indication of anxiety as guards are dispatched to seize him. While man proposes, Christ disposes, as we shall see in vs. 44-47. But there may even be a tinge of pity and sorrow here on the part of Jesus since privileged opportunity will soon be lost, that is according to divine rather than human planning.

- (a) Bigotry will lose its privilege, v. 33.

“Therefore Jesus said, ‘For a little while longer I am with you, then I go away to Him who sent Me.’” Simply put, “Your opportunity is now, and it will be short lived, after which judgment is coming, especially a foretaste of which will be the imminent destruction of Jerusalem!” Jesus’ understanding of His earthly course continues to be governed by unwavering focus on His sacrificial departure that is yet a gateway to His former heavenly home. Thus the countdown to his “hour” is rapidly shortening, yet overshadowing this seems to be anticipation, not so much of His imminent trial, but rather His longed for return to His Father. This perspective of heaven is presently beyond the perception of Jesus’ audience. The role of the approaching officers seems to be of little concern to Him.

- (b) Bigotry will be frustrated, v. 34.

“You will seek Me and will not find Me, and where I am you are not able to come.” There is a similar address in 13:33, except that it is to the disciples as “little children,” and thus has a different twist of meaning, especially since to them He does not add, “and [you] will not find Me.” Here there is a sense in which this expression, “and [you] will not find Me,” represents the frustration of unbelieving Judaism over subsequent centuries, in seeking Messiah and yet remaining unable to find Him. Even more sobering is the element of exclusion here that Jesus has already taught. In response to an enquiry as to whether few would be saved. He replied: “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:23-28). Simply put, Jesus is saying, “If you do not yield and believe in Me, a time will come when, in spite of your religious boasting, you will be locked out of heaven!” So Proverbs 1:28 addresses those who continuously spurn the personified wisdom of God, “Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they

¹⁸ J. H. Merle d’Aubigné, *The Reformation in England*, II, pp. 344-347.

will not find me.” Arrival at heaven’s gates can be too late (Matt. 25:11-12)!

(3) Bigotry is blind to Jesus’ departure, v. 35.

“Therefore the Jews said to themselves, ‘Where is this man about to go so that we shall not find Him? He does not intend to go to the dispersed [Jews] amongst the Greeks and teach the Greeks [Jewish proselytes?], does He? [Surely not!]’” Yet once more, concerning a teaching emphasis that John seems to dwell upon, Jesus’ declaration, having a more spiritual and heavenly meaning, is completely misunderstood according to a strictly earthly perspective. Probably the Jews expect that Jesus will attempt to flee from their grasp, and the only way this could be accomplished would be for Him to depart from Palestine. Again, this mindset of the Jews is strictly political without an ounce of spirituality in it. To the contrary, John later presents Greeks as seeking Jesus (12:20-22) who appear to be told that they will be included in His redemptive “drawing of all men to Himself” (12:32).

(4) Bigotry is blind to its exclusion from Jesus, v. 36.

“What is this word/statement that He said, ‘You will seek Me and will not find Me, and where I am you are not able to come?’” Here are religious “experts” who are baffled by teaching they cannot plumb. They suspect their explanation might be naïve, yet they are far too proud to humbly confess their ignorance and obtain from Jesus the real meaning of His teaching. Hence their inquisitiveness is proud. It is but a further manifestation of bigotry that, in the face of manifest new and challenging truth, is blindly committed to old truth. It is this attitude that guarantees exclusion from heaven. However Jesus, is never reluctant to make explanation when He senses the struggles of darkened minds. Hence John is about to move us a few days hence. Then Jesus will make a most clarifying, definitive statement concerning his teaching. Understanding will come, not by finer grammatical analysis, but rather faith that submits to Him as the fount of living water, the mediator of the Holy Spirit by means of His glorious redemption.

3. The discourse concerning the promise of the Holy Spirit, 7:37-52.

Over the centuries it has proved to be perennially true that the word’s of Jesus Christ have been regarded as highly controversial and divisive. At the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths this proves to be the case, especially when Jesus’ brief concluding exhortation, vs. 37-39, results in animated disagreement amongst “the people,” “the crowd,” “the officers,” “the chief priests,” “[the] Pharisees,” “the rulers,” “Nicodemus,” vs. 40-52.

a. The declaration of Jesus concerning His saving person and work, 7:37-39.

It is interesting that while the officers had been sent to arrest Jesus in the middle of the feast, that is the fourth day, vs. 14, 32, yet it now most likely being the final or eighth day, once more Jesus appears in the temple precincts, quite unrestricted.

He has probably been teaching, unhindered, during the intervening days. The enemies of Jesus, and the officers, are not hastening to their task!

(1) A gracious invitation to the spiritually thirsty, v. 37.

“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood [prominently] and cried out/shouted [cf. v. 28] saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty [third class, more probable condition with διψᾶω, dipsaō], let him come [ἐρχέσθω, erchesthō, present imperative] to Me and drink.’” There is association with earlier Galilean ministry (6:35, 47-58) in which the same basic entreaty was made.

(a) An entreaty that employs contrast.

During the first seven days, water libations were gathered by a priest from the pool of Siloam and poured into a bowl beside the altar while Isaiah 12:3 was chanted. These libations were probably in thankful remembrance for the water that God provided from the rock in the wilderness for His thirsty people (Ex. 17:6; Deut. 8:15). But now the libations have concluded until the next year; the present experience has faded because the outward ritual has ceased. So Jesus grasps the opportunity to teach concerning Himself that which he had already taught the woman at the well (4:13-14). This is the same point that Hebrews repeatedly makes when it contrasts the impotence of the outward, repetitious Mosaic sacrificial system and the efficacy of Jesus Christ through His shed blood that effectually, once-and-for-all cleanses the conscience (Heb. 1:3; 7:19; 9:9, 13-15; 10:22). No outward religious rite can cleanse the heart, whether animal sacrifices, water libations, or water baptism!

(b) An entreaty that embodies conviction.

This proclamation from the lips of Jesus to Israel as a whole, the last at this festival, must have conveyed a sense of overwhelming, climactic power and authority before the vast Jerusalem crowd, v. 46. There is no ambiguity, no mystery here, only the clearest declaration that He alone is the source of the life of God for those who are dead toward God (5:42; 7:28)! This truth remains unchanged even in this twenty-first century. As Horatius Bonar has written:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 ‘Behold, I freely give
 The living water—thirsty one,
 Stoop down, and drink, and live!’

I came to Jesus, and I drank
 Of that life-giving stream;
 My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
 And now I live in Him.

- (c) An entreaty that calls for a responsible verdict.

Technically we have a verb here in the imperative mood, “be coming [ἔρχέσθω, *erchesthō*] to Me,” that at the same time is also an impassioned invitation. This mood here does not exclusively indicate a command, but can also describe an entreaty whereby human volition is addressed.¹⁹ Consider the three imperatives of Matthew 6:9-10; are we simply commanding God here? Of course not! These are imperatives of entreaty, of desire, of longing (cf. 17:11; II Cor. 5:20). So here the Son of God entreats all of Israel, the *thirsty* that they might be urged to believe earnestly in Christ, the *non-thirsty* that they might be brought to accountability for their lack of thirst, and even consider a re-evaluation of their condition. If the remainder is not addressed, then it is not accountable. Hence, let us not lose sight of the plainness of the invitation here as Ryle explains.

We should note the simplicity of the course described to a thirsting sinner.—It is simply, “Let him come unto Me.” He has only to cast his soul on Christ, trust Him, lean on Him, believe on Him, commit his soul with all its burdens to Him, and that is enough.²⁰

- (2) A gracious explanation to the spiritually thirsty, vs. 38-39.

The analogy here concerns thirst being satisfied through the drinking of water that brings about temporal, fleeting satisfaction, having drawn upon the picture of the recent celebration and libations. There is immediate explanation in terms of the parched soul being permanently satisfied, that is through faith being placed in Jesus Christ resulting in eternal contentedness, specifically by means of the infilling of the very life of God. But again, the presupposition is an arid, barren, desolate soul.

- (a) Rivers of living water promised by Scripture, v. 38.

“He who believes in Me, just as the Scripture said, ‘From out of his stomach/innermost being [κοιλία, *koilia*] will flow rivers of living water.’” There is no exact Old Testament passage to match here; possibly Jesus refers to water from the rock in the wilderness (Deut. 8:14-15; Ps. 78:20; 105:40-41; cf. I Cor. 10:1-4); probably more direct inferences found in Isaiah are intended (Isa. 55:1-3; 58:11). Thus Jesus is the fountainhead by means of which believers become sub-fountains (4:14). The connection of faith brings forth flow from the well-spring, even Christ, which fills a man’s soul, his spiritual belly, and overflows.²¹

¹⁹ “*The Imperative of Entreaty*. Often the imperative does not convey the finality of command, but has the force of urgency or request.” H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 176.

²⁰ Ryle, *John*, II, pp. 50-51.

²¹ The alternative translation, whereby the rivers of living water flow from Christ’s innermost being, seems to ignore that fact that while Christ is undoubtedly the source of this abundance of life, yet those who are recipients, who receive this effusion by means of the conduit of faith, are not consequently passive but active as a spring, overflowing, shall we even say volcanic, because of the new abundance that must erupt (4:14).

- (b) Redemption that obtains rivers of living water, v. 39.

“But this He said concerning the Spirit whom those, having believed in Him, were about to receive. For the Spirit was not yet [outpoured] because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Modern evangelism often conveys the idea that all that is necessary for a believer is for him to be “born again” (John 3:3-8), in which case the necessity of redemption and justification is frequently ignored. Even Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones confesses to falling into this misunderstanding.

In the early part of my ministry I preached regeneration as the great message, but not justification (George Whitefield did the same for a time, you know). I preached what I was sure of. I neglected the Atonement, but within about two years I came to see that was an incomplete message.²²

This revelation here of Jesus concerning the untapped well of salvation as an imminent baptism in the Spirit (Isa. 12:2-3; 41:18; Jer. 2:13), resulting from Christ’s glorification (Eph. 4:7-13), does not come until redemption through the cross has procured a righteous ground for this outpouring “on all mankind” (Acts 2:17). The Cross necessarily precedes Pentecost. Hence, what is required is both justification and regeneration as Jesus now explains. Biblical conversion involves both being in right standing with God and alive in one’s soul unto God. This salvation Jesus Christ alone mediates; it is forever, and it comes through faith alone.

- b. The dispute concerning Jesus’ saving person and work, vs. 40-52.

Leon Morris aptly titles this section, “Pride and Prejudice.”²³ It is interesting to contemplate that following the editorial explanation of John in v. 39 concerning the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we have here, in this cauldron of conflicting opinion, a perfect indication of man’s general contentious attitude concerning Jesus when there is no such visitation of the Spirit.

- (1) Discussion amongst the people, vs. 40-42.

During Jesus’ powerful proclamation, that has probably just concluded, it is likely that there was intense and focused attention by the large audience (cf. v. 46). At this time of authoritative preaching, as distinct from earlier interaction, none would have dared to interrupt. But now that Jesus has stepped down, suddenly cacophonous interaction erupts.

- (a) He is the Prophet, v. 40.

“Therefore from the crowd of those who had heard these words, [there were some] saying, ‘This is truly/certainly the Prophet.’” This is a

²² Carl Henry, “Martyn Lloyd-Jones: An interview by Carl Henry,” *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1980, p. 34.

²³ Morris, *Reflections on John*, p. 283.

biblically literate gathering, so that some identify Jesus with Moses' prophecy, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, . . . and I will put My words in his mouth" (Deut. 18:15, 18). However this possibility had been considered on two earlier occasions (1:21, 25; 6:14). Probably some of Jesus' signs were likened to those of Moses. Now they may think that Jesus speaks like Moses.

(b) He is the Christ, v. 41a.

"Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.'" Such an affirmation opened a door for detailed investigation since the coming of Messiah, being greater than the prophet, was a matter of detailed expectation. If some of this group, probably Judeans, were aware of Jesus' birthplace being Bethlehem, of his lineage, they did not let on.

(c) He is a Galilean, vs. 41b-42.

"Yet others were saying, 'Surely the Christ is not coming from Galilee, is He? [No].' Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed/descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" Clearly the large crowd sees Jesus as an enigma; details of his early life are not widely known. Perhaps we have a conflict of opinion between northerners and southerners. Possibly the Galilean delegation is voicing its understanding of Jesus as a Nazarene, certainly the Prophet, but not the Messiah (cf. II Sam. 2:12-16; Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 9:7; 55:3; Mic. 5:2). Of course John knows otherwise and he may well pose the objection here with a sense of irony. It is as if someone asked the dumb question: "Jesus has not come from the seed of David and Bethlehem, has he? [No]." And John is implicitly replying, "Of course He has! How could you not know?" The southern ministry of John the Baptist would have plainly declared these qualifications. But there is further irony in the fact that while Israel, under Roman subjection, was acutely watchful for Messiah, yet it was blind to the clarity of His self-proclamation.

(2) Division amongst the crowd, vs. 43-44.

Perhaps the most significant question that anyone could ask is, "Who is Jesus Christ?" It really must come even before we ask, "What has Jesus Christ done?" The following animated dispute bears this out. The supreme issue concerns whether Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. To agree is to confess that he is divine and He has come from God, and consequently we are obliged to fall at His feet in worship. To disagree is to charge him with being a religious fraud and charlatan. There is no middle ground because Jesus is adamant about His claims. So the turbulent crowd here divides along these lines. So every person you meet is similarly divided, one way or the other.

- (a) Jesus is the subject of division, v. 43.

“Therefore a division/schism [σχίσμα, schisma] came about in the crowd because of Him.” This is the first of three such expressions in John (9:16; 10:19), used in the context of increasing animosity toward Jesus as a “deceiver” (7:47), as a “godless sinner” (9:16, 24), as “demonic and insane” (10:20). But then we also learn of those who believe and declare “this is the Christ” (7:41), “Lord, I believe” (9:38), “this Man opens the eyes of the blind” (10:21). So Ryle comments:

So long as human nature is corrupt Christ will be a cause of division and difference among men. To some He is a savor of life, and to others of death (II Cor. 2:16). Grace and nature never will agree any more than oil and water, acid and alkali. A state of entire quiet, and the absence of any religious division, is often no good sign of the condition of a Church or a parish. It may even be a symptom of spiritual disease and death. The question may possibly be needful in such cases, “Is Christ there?”²⁴

- (b) Jesus is the subject of timidity, v. 44.

“Certain ones of the crowd desired to seize Him, but no one laid hands on him.” Once a man is confronted with the real truth concerning Jesus Christ, and as a consequence, he bucks this revelation instead of bowing before it, there is no limit to the lengths he will go so as to “exchange the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). If he can’t run away from the truth, then he will endeavor to extinguish it, to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). But for such a person, the most frustrating consequence is expressed by the Psalmist, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” There is no escape even in the grave or darkness (Ps. 139:7-12). And this is proved here by the explanation, “But no man laid hands on Him.” Why? Certainly because of cowardly fear, but also because His hour had not yet come. The Lord Jesus is in control, not man. You cannot do away with Christ according to your whim. The Jews cried out to Pilate, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” (19:15). But He rose from the dead and is proclaimed throughout the world.

- (3) Division amongst the Jewish leaders, vs. 45-52.

Whereas vs. 40-44 have focused on dissension amongst “the people” and “the crowd,” now three distinct groups, involving degrees of authority, are also caught up in disagreement amongst themselves, namely “the officers,” “the Pharisees,” and “Nicodemus.” Thus Jesus Christ confronts and divides all levels of society; they all have the same problem!

- (a) The testimony of the officers, vs. 45-46.

These “officers [οἱ ὑπηρέται, hoi hupēretai],” literally “under rowers,” were subordinates or bailiffs of the Sanhedrin (18:3; Act 5:22, 26). Four

²⁴ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 43.

days ago they had been ordered to seize Jesus (7:14, 32), though they have been delayed, probably on account of the awesome impression they had received.

1) Their return without Jesus, v. 45.

“Therefore the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees and they said to them, ‘For what reason did you not bring Him?’” What then were the officers doing during the four day interval, instead of immediately taking Jesus captive? Most likely they increasingly became engrossed with Jesus’ daily ministry and delayed in fulfilling their appointed task. At the same time they witnessed the interest of the crowd in Jesus and consequently were reluctant to cut short such a welcome presentation. After the conclusion of the feast, on the eighth day, the officers had become so impressed with Jesus that they were emboldened to return to their superiors empty handed, knowing that they would be required to provide a good explanation.

2) Their report concerning Jesus, v. 46.

“The officers answered, ‘Never has man spoken [as this man spoke!]’” It might have been easier for them to express their opinion that the crowd being so enraptured with Jesus’ ministry, prudence called for delay. But the officers opt for honesty. They are not religious illiterates, being recruited from the Levites. They have heard the best of religious speakers that Jerusalem could offer, even amongst privileged audiences. But, in this instance, “Never has man [in any generation since Adam] spoken [in this manner].” Elsewhere Jesus had communicated “authority” (Mark 1:22), “gracious words” (Luke 4:22), and aroused “amazement” (Mark 12:17), “enjoyment” (Mark 12:37). Yet here, never has mere humanity preached in this fashion. There was something divine that comprised this humanity, and there was also collective agreement in this regard.

(b) The testimony of the Pharisees, vs. 47-49.

Here the learned, fundamentalist, orthodox Jewish theologians are aroused, but in a manner unlike that of their guards. They know the Scripture better than most as well as Jewish systematic theology, and they are very much aware of Jesus’ works and words. But while learning can be enlightening, it can also bring about intellectual snobbery and the most sophisticated form of bigotry that is accompanied with the paralysis of enlightenment.

1) Jesus leads the people astray, v. 47.

“Therefore the Pharisees answered them, ‘You also have not been deceived [πλανάω, planaō], have you? [No, surely not!]’” This is

an arrogant put-down that accuses the guards with foolishly being mesmerized by Jesus. They are saying, “You are not very clever, are you?” As well their ridicule implies that they, with their ability to think more clearly through a problem, know so much better. The common people are simply gullible fools. However, these who are quintessentially religious, are so full of themselves that they are oblivious to the calloused, perilous condition of their souls. Here is the worst form of religious elitism that often effects the higher ranks of religious organizations. These face the most terrifying future of hearing the Son of God declare, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23).

2) Jesus has no aristocratic following, v. 48.

“Not any of the rulers or Pharisees have believed in him, have they? [In no way!]” There is the inclusion here of the more political and pragmatic leaders who would hardly esteem Jesus in spiritual terms. Nevertheless the Pharisee’s outward confession of self-esteem cannot be suppressed, even with cosmetic modesty. They see themselves as esteemed leaders, even though Jesus calls them “blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15:14). As Ryle well points out: “The very possession of rank and learning is often a positive hindrance to a man’s soul.”²⁵ In this vein Paul teaches that, “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” are called (I Cor. 1:26). However this bubble of pride will soon burst when “the teacher in Israel” (3:10) interrupts.

3) Jesus has brought a curse upon the people, v. 49.

“But this crowd which does not know the Law, they are accursed [ἐπάρατος, eparatos].” Here the shepherds of Israel sneer at the flock (Ezek. 34:1-10). The people are regarded as a senseless herd, a mob, unless they pay attention to their leaders. In this respect animals are often too dumb for their own good. As a consequence this crowd, representative of the nation as a whole, is under an imposed curse because of its ignorance of the Law (Deut. 27:26). Of course the irony here is that, comparatively speaking, the common people with their ignorance have a better sense of spiritual perception than their leaders, who have spent years in minutely studying Scripture. At least the people have a sense of where there is a better Shepherd and pasture (Ezek. 34:11-16).

(c) The Testimony of Nicodemus, vs. 50-52.

Clearly Nicodemus has been carefully listening to the preceding conference with the officers. And thus he brings to the fore, not only recollection of his earlier encounter with Jesus, 3:1-12, but also the fact

²⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

that over a period of eighteen months, this most learned man, constantly embroiled in matters of the Sanhedrin, has been seriously wrestling with the person of Jesus Christ. His first encounter may have appeared fruitless, but now we know better, and the future may reveal further progress (19:39). Spiritual pregnancy, like natural pregnancy, has both its normative representations, and also, as here, those exceptional abnormal incubation periods that sometimes need particular nurture, that is the care of able spiritual midwives.

1) His reputation v. 50.

“Nicodemus said to them, he who formerly came to Him [Jesus], being one of them [the Pharisees].” The other Pharisees suddenly turn pallid, mainly because of timing in the light of v. 48. The fact that John knew of the earlier meeting, and mentions it here even by way of identification, may suggest that this earlier encounter had become common knowledge among the people. Further, over the past eighteen months the other Pharisees may have also learned of rumored indications that Nicodemus had some sympathy for Jesus. Here then is an exception to the rule of proverbial, smug Pharisaism. So Ryle well perceives:

We must never conclude hastily that there can be no Christians among a body of men, because the great majority of them hate Christ, and are hardened in wickedness. There was a Lot in Sodom, an Obadiah in Ahab’s house, a Daniel in Babylon, saints in Nero’s palace, and a Nicodemus among the Pharisees. He was “one out of their number,” but not one of them in spirit.”²⁶

2) His reasoning, v. 51.

“Our Law does not judge a man except first it hear from him and knows what he does, does it? [No!]” Here Israel’s premier scholar raises a logical point concerning proper judicial procedure (Acts 5:34-39) that is also paralleled in Roman law (Acts 25:16). This question may simply be saying, “You sent the officers to bring Jesus to us for close investigation. Hence is it right to judge Him before we have heard his testimony in private?” But further, Nicodemus may subtly be suggesting, “If you declare the people accursed for their lack of discernment, are we not also accursed because we are plainly unjust, even bigoted?”

3) His rebuke, v. 52.

“And they answered and said to him, ‘You are not also from Galilee, are you? [No!] Search and see that out of Galilee no [the?] prophet arises.’” Here the reason is made clear as to why

²⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

Nicodemus' earlier approach to Jesus was by night. He had witnessed their taunting, derisive manner on countless occasions when a lone Sanhedrin member did not follow the party line. Here is also the intimation that Nicodemus was perceived by his colleagues to be inclined toward Jesus. And here as well the contemptuous response includes insult, the humiliating suggestion of being a low status Galilean. What then is the response of Nicodemus? Sad to say, it appears to be the silence of those whose status and security is threatened. Such is their estimate of their position that they count the cost and find the price too high! Perhaps Nicodemus does eventually accept the yoke of Christ. There is the tradition that he gave evidence in favor of Jesus at His trial, that he was expelled from the Sanhedrin and baptized by Peter and John. Yet here there is only sorry silence at this stage. But the Spirit of God has not given up on this man (19:39). Perhaps in his cowardly wrestling he is "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

4. The woman taken in adultery, 7:53-8:11.

The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11, and for this reason the NASB and NIV distinguish it from the main text of John.²⁷ Vocabulary and literary composition, more akin to the Synoptics, are against recognition, as is the continuity of 7:52, 8:12. Nevertheless, critical questions aside, there is substantial agreement that this incident describes a real event in Jesus' ministry, and for this reason we regard it as the authentic Word of God. It may well represent a further conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees that occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles just concluded. While this passage was probably recorded by a human author other than John, yet it was most likely felt worthy of inclusion in John at this juncture on a later occasion. So we still focus on the ongoing conflict that Jesus has stimulated at the close of this festive occasion.

a. The setting of the scene, 7:53-8:2.

Jesus appears to have slipped away from the crowd following his challenging exhortation of 7:37-38. The remaining crowd, after extended dispute, has now dispersed. So as Jerusalem has witnessed a great influx of pilgrims from all corners of the Land of Israel, they now commence their journeys homeward. However the scribes and Pharisees, along with their bailiffs, remain and thus continue to strive against Jesus in whatever ways they can contrive. Now another possibility presents itself.

²⁷ Bruce Metzger writes that evidence for Johannine exclusion is "overwhelming. . . . the case against its being of Johannine authorship appears to be conclusive. At the same time the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity." *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, pp. 219-220. Similarly Carson, Hendriksen, Morris.

- (1) The retirement of the crowd, 7:53.

“And everyone went to his house.” In particular Jesus’ brethren from Galilee and Nazareth depart northward. There is no real decisiveness concerning this controversial Rabbi being the Christ, otherwise many of the crowd would have devoutly remained with Him. So He now finds Himself more alone in Jerusalem than ever, His supporters in general having departed.

- (2) The retirement of Jesus, 8:1.

“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” The Sanhedrin has disbursed. The officers had been dismissed. Nicodemus had brought about a stalemate. Jesus still had not been seized, so that He retired for the evening to a place of solitude. Undoubtedly He could have found hospitality at the home of Lazarus in Bethany. It was not that He had no place to retire for the evening; rather His preference was for prayerful intercourse with the Father in seclusion. Thus, “during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet” (Luke 21:37). But further, Jesus will remain close to Jerusalem from now on and not return to Galilee.

- (3) The return of Jesus, 8:2.

“Early in the morning, again He came into the temple and all the people were coming to Him, and having sat down, He began to teach them” (cf. Luke 21:37-38). Jesus teaching ministry in the temple was extensive, from early morning till late in the afternoon, perhaps with the inclusion of a break during the hottest part of the day. For this reason, unlike the preceding proclamation, 7:37-38, Jesus seats himself to teach, as was the usual custom. However, His attraction on the part of the people surely fostered jealous rivalry on the part of the Jewish leaders. While they made plans to do away with Him, there was also the intent to humiliate Him, v. 6, in the presence of the people. This had been attempted on several occasions without success (Matt. 16:1-4; 19:3-9; 22:15-22, 34-46). Now their belief is that they have an ironclad, tangible moral quandary to present to this Sabbath breaking blasphemer, this messianic pretender.

- b. A lesson concerning the *bondage* of sin, vs. 3-6a.

Now this sordid situation, conjures up the picture of a bedraggled, tearful, distraught, shameful woman, who cringes before the snarling faces and pointed boney fingers of judgmental religious bigots. However the real question arises as to who is the greatest sinner here. Sin does have its degrees of intensity.

- (1) The presentation of the sinful woman, v. 3.

“And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a women [to Him], having been taken/caught in adultery [μοιχεία, moicheia] and having stood her in the midst [of the gathering].” Actually the bailiffs would have delivered the woman since their masters feared becoming unclean. However, the fact that Jewish law required two witnesses for such a transgression as adultery, plus

the fact that the woman's partner is not brought along as being complicit, brings suspicion to the whole situation.²⁸ It is most likely a set-up for the purpose of a put-down for Jesus. Implicit is the Jewish leaders' opinion that Jesus is too merciful toward sinners, even hospitable toward them (Matt. 9:11; 11:19)! Hence, in such a flagrant, proven case of immorality, mercy would be difficult.

(2) The accusation of the sinful woman, vs. 4-5.

(a) The charge of adultery, v. 4.

“They said to Him, ‘Teacher, this women has been taken/caught in the act of adultery.’” But as Morris points out, “adultery was an offense very hard to prove. . . . There was moreover a legal rule, ‘No penalty without a warning.’ . . . An interesting provision is that a scholar need not be warned orally. It is presumed that his study of the Law made him aware of what he should and should not do. But lesser mortals had to be told.”²⁹ How the crowd must have suddenly increased and listened with heightened focus at this “tabloid” situation. They well knew that this was an intense, titanic conflict between establishment religion and a seeming breath of fresh air.

(b) The penalty of adultery, v. 5.

“Now in which Law Moses commanded us to stone such women [to death]. Therefore what do You say?” The Law of Moses did indeed prescribe death for the adulterer (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24), though Rome appears to have been reluctant to allow this action. Certainly Jesus does not appear to challenge the correctness of this basic truth. However the struggle here between opposite forces is no mere biblical enquiry. Here the Living Word of God, sovereign over the Law of Moses, is asked concerning the Law of Moses by those who administer the Law of Moses and yet do not keep the Law of Moses!

(3) The usefulness of the sinful woman, v. 6a.

“But they were saying this [and thus] tempting Him so that they might be able [formally] to accuse Him.” Here was a destitute woman treated by the shepherds of Israel as a mere pawn for the accomplishment of their own hypocritical, devilish plans. Even the disciples will later be guilty of such insensitive concern for a person in pitiful need, while at the same time Jesus perceives the same person with a very different perspective (9:1-2).

However there is an added dimension in the sinning of the Jewish leaders in this instance. Here we have those who, while pretending to uphold the righteousness of the Law, yet at the same time are orchestrating extreme

²⁸ Morris, *Reflections On John*, pp. 292-294.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 292-293.

unrighteousness in breaking that same Law. Further this pretended righteousness is displayed in the very presence of the righteous Son of God.

Hence we may well ask, will the real sinner please stand up! Yes, sin does have degrees of intensity. Certainly the woman is guilty of serious sin. But surely much more to be condemned is the hideous attitude of the religious leaders of Israel. And the following interaction would bear this out. The women's sin is essentially that which is extrinsically of the flesh and sensuality, like a skin disease. But the sin of the scribes and Pharisees is that which is intrinsic to the soul, like an insidious cancer. Both conditions need the surgery of Jesus Christ. But so often the internal cancer is far more difficult to detect or acknowledge, especially when covered by a cloak of religion!

There is hope for the woman, as we shall soon see. And even the scribes and Pharisees are not beyond hope, as Nicodemus demonstrates. But he is the far more difficult case to deal with. However his colleagues, according to their own devising, seem beyond remedy. What a terrible, insidious affliction is sin. Nothing less than the Son of God from heaven could cure it!

c. A lesson concerning the *conviction* of sin, vs. 6b-9.

It is an astounding fact that Jesus Christ is known to have written on only one occasion, as here, and yet how short lived was that inscription, trampled under foot, perhaps intentionally! On the other hand, how permanent has the incident surrounding it proved to be. Furthermore, in the last verse of this Gospel John tells us that, "there were many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (21:25).

(1) The revelation of Jesus, v. 6b.

"But Jesus stooped down [and] with [His] finger wrote on the earth/ground." Remember that Jesus has been asked concerning the Law's prescription of the death penalty for adultery. Here is His silent answer. Speculation as to what Jesus wrote is various. Real possibilities are: 1. The sins of the accusers, details of a devious plot. 2. The commandments other than the seventh, prohibiting adultery. 3. Jeremiah 17:13, "O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters." KJV. 4. Scripture prohibiting a false witness (Exod. 23:1, 7). 5. Meaningless doodling, reflecting disdain for the unholy scheming of those making the enquiry.

(2) The requisition of Jesus, v. 7.

"And as they continued/persisted asking Him, He stood up and said to them, "Whoever is without sin [ἀναμάρτητος, anamartētos] among you, let him first throw a stone at her." It seems Jesus kept writing while the Jewish leaders, increasingly more shrill, continued to press their question. Misunderstanding Jesus' silence, they intensified their enquiry. Then Jesus, quite unflustered,

stood up and presented a totally disarming proposition. It is possible that as he commences to speak, at the same time He points to what He has written. So He cuts the air with His reply, while obliquely agreeing with the death penalty (Deut. 13:9; 17:7). However at the same time Jesus broadens the company of the accused. By this means judgment was not eliminated; however the judges were about to be proven as disqualified according to their own shameful, cringing silence. There is the strong intimation here that the Jewish leaders are, on account of Jesus' omniscience, just as guilty as sinners as is the woman. However, as Carson well points out:

Jesus' saying does not mean that one must be free even from lust before one can legitimately condemn adultery (even though lust and adultery belong to the same genus, Matt. 5:28). It means, rather, that they must not be guilty of this particular sin.³⁰

Thus when Jesus speaks of, "Whoever is without sin among you," He is specifically referring to the Jewish leaders' complicity in this whole sordid affair. In this situation they are disbarred from judging, from executing a just judgment, and indeed even asking the biblical question in the first place. Here then our Savior upholds the integrity of both public and religious office. A high calling requires high moral standards.

(3) The repeated revelation of Jesus, v. 8.

"And again, having stooped down, He wrote on the ground." This would suggest that Jesus' reemphasizes what he had earlier written. Perhaps He adds more crushing details which, if formally brought into the open would lead to a scandalous trial, a revelation of ungodly treachery, and consequent disbarment. Surely emphasis on the hypocrisy of these unjust judges has only increased. Following the commanding, piercing verbal challenge, this additional writing only further exacerbates the already inflicted wound. But now a hush comes over the accusers, eye contact drops, while guilty fidgeting betrays the bursting of an empty bubble, that is yet another totally deflated challenge. Such is the judgment of Jesus Christ that left highly religious, biblically taught men speechless with guilt. And this same Jesus taught that a similar scenario will be enacted, again with He as judge at the end of this age. He will ask, 'Friend, how did you come in here [to this wedding feast as a pretender] without wedding clothes? And the man [will be] speechless. . . . [Then came the King's command] Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness" (Matt. 22:1-13)."

(4) The retreat from Jesus' revelation, v. 9.

"And those having heard [being convicted by their conscience, NKJV], one after the other they departed, commencing with the elders/the elder ones, with He being left alone, also the woman, in the midst of the court." The departure here is according to the Jewish ruler's pecking order, which suggests that the highest ranking within the Sanhedrin were guilty. Though

³⁰ Carson, *John*, p. 336.

where is Nicodemus? Of course the crowd in general did not depart. So here is well illustrated the capacity of the word of Christ to strike at a sinner's heart as distinct from the Law of Moses. Now Moses can do such a work, but Jesus Christ does not need Moses in this regard. However, He does address the conscience in a manner that strips away all pretense, especially here with regard to the religious sinner (Rom. 2:15, 22; II Cor. 4:2). And the only choice is to retreat or remain.

The dealing of Christian and Faithful with Talkative in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* perfectly illustrates this retreat. While he could freely speak of "the necessity of the new birth, the insufficiency of our works, the need of Christ's righteousness," yet because "his house [was] . . . as empty of religion, as the white of an egg is of savor," so he disliked conversation about the state of his own soul. Pressed on this point he blushed, and in response to Talkative declared, "[Y]ou are some peevish or melancholy man, not fit to be discoursed with, and so adieu."³¹ But notice that one person does remain, and this woman appears not to be in a hurry to retreat. Why is this so? Surely it is because in the demeanor of this Jesus of Nazareth, there is an uncommon union of righteousness and grace, of holiness and mercy. There is not the slightest justification of this woman's lifestyle; there is no diminution of her guilt. However in Jesus there is "justice that manifests mercy" (Hab. 3:2), a union of "lovingkindness and truth," a kissing of "righteousness and peace" (Ps. 94:10; 89:14).

d. A lesson concerning personal *focus* of sin, vs. 10-11.

There is a most fundamental principle illustrated here. It is that men and women, being insensitive to their own sin, are very ready in a judgmental sense to point out the sins of others, as was the case with David's blinding hypocrisy (II Sam. 12:1-6). However, upon such people becoming aware of their own exceeding sinfulness, then they forget the plight of others and in shock, solely focus on their own naked guilt. Such a person will then respond with either a profound sense of repentance, as did David (II Sam. 12:7-13), or they will make a swift retreat on account of embarrassment, humiliation, as here.

(1) Jesus' enquiry of the woman, v. 10.

"And Jesus having stood up, He said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?'" For a second time, Jesus has been writing on the sandy ground, v. 8, following His call for self-examination, v. 7. This further period of writing seems to be protracted because the Jewish leaders depart, one by one, and Jesus does not appear to stand up again until they are gone. Their problem seems to be that the longer they stay, the more He writes, hence the more eager they are to depart. Only when the scribes and Pharisees have left does Jesus stop writing and stand up.

There is both similarity here and yet variation concerning Jesus' earlier dealing with another woman of like character. To the Samaritan woman at

³¹ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 121-122, 125.

the well He probed her sordid soul until she felt pain, and then revealed grace (4:7, 10-11, 16, 25-26). Here others have probed and aggravated this disreputable woman's soul; that is not so difficult to do. Now Jesus gently stimulates her appreciation of grace in Himself. His question, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" draws forth appreciation of what Jesus has done, after the manner of 1:17, "the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized by Jesus Christ." Finally in life, what counts is not the condemnation of man, justified as it might appear to be. More important is how heaven reckons with my sin. So Jesus has come from heaven to drive condemnation away. Here is a dramatic sermon on this theme that none of those observing would forget. Imagine the spreading reports that follow concerning such a scandalous, unprecedented incident! Jesus would retain His reputation of being a friend of sinners!

(2) Jesus' exhortation to the woman, v. 11.

"She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go! From now on do not sin any more.'" In fact the meaning of Jesus' question was, "Did no one [remain] to condemn you?" Suddenly the charge of a capital offence has vanished; by way of illustration, how able is Christ to deal with condemnation.

- (a) What then is the *response* to Jesus? In confessing, "No one, Lord," we have the first and last words from this cringing woman's lips. Surely there is a sense of relief that comes over her face. She is polite, even reverential. Amazingly there is no inquisition from this man. Has she heard of Jesus before? Quite possibly. Certainly her curiosity must have been aroused. But she needs to know more, and there is every encouragement to do so.
- (b) What then is the *reprieve* of Jesus? It is not forgiveness, based upon trust in Jesus as the Messiah. Justification and pardon come only through faith that is not presently evident. Nevertheless, here, as Ryle puts it, is "mingled kindness and perfect wisdom,"³² forbearance, though not pardon. At other times Jesus has been severe in His verbal judgment (Matt. 23:1-36). But here judgment deferred concerns later, direct imposition of divine wrath since Jesus has not appeared a first time to judge (3:17-18; 8:15; 12:47). His coming a second time will be, "from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (II Thess. 1:7-9; cf. Rev. 6:12-17).

But from another perspective who is this Jesus who boldly, audaciously confronts the Sanhedrin, and yet although not a member of the Sanhedrin, speaks as if He were? There is authority here in Jesus' deportment.

³² Ryle, *John*, II, p. 82.

- (c) What then is the *recommendation* of Jesus? “Go! From now on do not sin any more.” There is not the slightest tolerance here of this woman’s lifestyle; but her qualification for judgment is confronted with mercy, which is expressed in a call for repentance. It cannot be said that this woman’s sin is forgiven, and that her day of judgment is past.

But also notice that Jesus does *not* merely say, “Go! From now on do not commit the *sin of adultery* any more.” Rather He exhorts, “Do not *sin* any more.” From another perspective, Jesus is saying to the woman, “Go! And from now on confront the matter of sin in your life with all seriousness. Wrestle with it! Don’t suppress and bury the thought of it! Learn to detest it and see it for what it is, in all of its ugliness. Up till now you have treated sin in a cavalier, matter-of-fact, couldn’t-care-less fashion, and look where this has got you. Turn around in your attitude, awake to the mortal cancer of the human soul, and seek for its remedy. If she, indeed anyone, would follow this path, then it could lead only to one satisfactory Physician. Jesus’ teaching during the Feast of Tabernacles, having just concluded, makes it abundantly clear who that Physician is, 7:37-38.

5. The light of the world discourse, 8:12-59.

Have you heard of an ailment called SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder, evidenced by depression, tiredness, withdrawal, irritability, reclusiveness, especially during winter months of prolonged darkness? Many scientists believe that it is caused by light deprivation. Hence, there has developed the remedy of light therapy. How interesting it is that the Bible describes man as being overcome with darkness while Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the remedy in John 8:12. Human life is especially dependent upon the staples of water, bread, and light, and so it is the case with the human soul. In particular Jesus has already presented Himself as the water of life (4:10, 14; 6:35; 7:37) and the bread of life (6:35, 57-58). And while there has been considerable indirect reference thus far to the light He embodies and imparts (1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21), now there is the explicit, audacious declaration from His own lips that He is “the light of the world.”

- a. The witness of Jesus concerning Himself, vs. 12-30.

Again we are faced with the revelation of Jesus Christ’s self-consciousness, that is what He thought and claimed concerning Himself, and again, from a human perspective, we are further astonished. But when we understand who He is, then this amazement turns to worship.

- (1) His witness is true, vs. 12-20.

There is good reason for connecting 7:53 with 8:12, in which case we still consider Jesus’ ongoing teaching here as following closely on the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles. At the commencement of the Feast four large candelabra were lit in the temple court of the women, but later extinguished at the end of the celebrations. To replenish the oil, they had to be reached by ladders. It was intended to commemorate the pillar of fire in the desert that

indicated God's protective presence with the nation of Israel as it traversed the Sinai Peninsula wilderness. Perhaps Jesus ministers close to where the candelabra so brilliantly illuminated the temple precincts, though probably with a reduced crowd. Perhaps the relative dullness is now noticeable.

(a) He is the light of the world, v. 12.

“Therefore Jesus again spoke to them [saying], ‘I Myself am [Ἐγὼ εἰμι, Egō eimi] the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.’” Here is the second of the seven “I Myself am” pronouncements of Jesus, cf. 6:35. If His audience is reduced, it remains familiar. He focuses on the Pharisees who most recently had vilified Him in the presence of the temple guard and Nicodemus, 7:45-52. On the other hand, if we include 7:53-8:1 as recent, Jesus is again addressing those He has humiliated before the adulterous woman.

1) *The Light of the world identified.*

Our appreciation of Jesus' remarkable claim here is wholly dependent upon our discriminating assessment of the world around us, especially in the moral and spiritual realm. Up to this point Jesus' denunciation of the whole world order has been categorical, especially in 3:19-21 where this darkness is defined as active evil in which mankind loves [ἀγαπάω, agapaō] to swim, as in a pig pen.

By way of contrast, consider the identification of Jehovah in the Old Testament with light such as, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear” (Ps. 27:1; cf. 44:3), or especially concerning the future hope of light coming to Jerusalem (Isa, 60:1-3, 19-20). So “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5), this especially being with reference to the radiance of His holiness. And of His Son it is said, “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness [of this world]” (1:4-5). This was visibly evident at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). But further reflect on the stupendous claim of Jesus of Nazareth that He is light, not merely concerning Israel, but the world of Adam's race. He shines upon both the reprobate and elect, bringing condemnation and illumination, both hardening and melting influences (9:5).

2) *The darkness of the world repudiated.*

There is a stark contrast here between those who follow Jesus and those who follow darkness. Life is portrayed as a pilgrimage along either a dark, broad way, or an illuminated, narrow way (Matt. 7:13-14). Each way is mutually exclusive of the other. The dark way tends to engulf, to swallow up, to incapacitate, to stupefy. Hence the Light of Jesus Christ is not merely to be wondered at,

but submitted to in following its leading. As we follow we “become sons of Light” (12:35-36). Physically speaking, darkness impedes growth while light improves our complexion. Spiritually speaking, darkness pollutes, blinds, befuddles, while the closeness of the light of Christ clarifies, resulting in our “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:18). If we have “the Light of life,” that is “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” then we will know what it is to be “set free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2).

3) *The Light of Life recommended.*

There is light in this world that is therapeutically beneficial; it awakens life; it is like taking off on a cloudy day and then soaring through that layer of cloud into the invigorating, vast bright blue sky above. So the human soul is under a cloud, a weight of guilt, a void of discontent, a constant restlessness, a mood of darkness, that sin and godlessness produce. It is like a “broken cistern that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). But of God we are told, “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9). So if a person turns from God He walks in darkness. Hence Jesus is not only bread for the hungry soul, water for the thirsty soul, but life for the dead soul and light for the darkened soul. Thus, “God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (II Cor. 4:6).

(b) He is witnessed to by the Father, vs. 13-20.

In this deranged world, we must always keep in mind that the truth, however obvious and indisputable it may seem, will always be opposed by some people. Consider the flat earth society, the denial that Americans landed on the moon, the denial of the Holocaust, etc. The reason of course is that it often does not suit an individual to accept that which is transparently clear. Hence, so much the worse for the truth. A hidden agenda often trumps the uncomfortable facts. And so it is the case with the fundamentalist Pharisees who, being personally threatened with the truth, must oppose it come what may.

1) The charge of an invalid testimony, v. 13.

“Therefore the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are testifying [μαρτυρέω, martureō] about yourself. Your testimony [about yourself] is not true [legally accept-able].’” It is Jesus’ uncompromising proclamation in v. 12 that has aroused such indignation, and diversionary argumentation. It is close to an *ad hominem* challenge, a legal point concerning Jesus’ “invalid” testimony (Deut. 17:6; 19:15), not the overwhelming evidence of His ministry. Today we might impudently respond to Jesus: “Just

because you say so doesn't make it so." Though it is significant that these challengers do not say: "Please provide us with some witnesses so that we might impartially consider your claim." Of course, from an ultimate sense, as God can swear by no other than Himself (Heb. 6:13), so He alone is the only necessary testimony concerning Himself that counts. Thus, in Jesus being the Son of God, He really does not need any witnesses to Himself.

2) The validity of Jesus' testimony, vs. 14-18.

However, while Jesus explained to Peter that He really did not have to pay "customs duty or poll- tax," and then condescended to pay tribute money in an astonishing manner, so as "not to offend" (Matt. 17:24-27), so He now stoops to the level of His opponents, and responds to their level of argument.

a) The testimony of Jesus from Himself, vs. 14-15.

To begin with He will not solely yield to the ground of the Law's evidential demand presented to Him, especially since He is the ultimate judge and ought not to be subject to man's scrutiny.

i His testimony is true, v. 14.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Even if I testify concerning Myself, My testimony is true/valid because I know from where I came and where I am going; but you do not know from where I came or where I am going.'" For the moment the argument is raised beyond the matter of objective judicial evidence to the fundamental truth of subjective self-awareness, self consciousness, as v. 12 made clear. The Law does not emphasize this, but Jesus is not hesitant in raising this higher vital perspective. What ultimately counts is not what others testify about me, but what I know to be true about myself. This is especially true with Jesus concerning His origin (3:11-13; 13:1; 16:5, 28). His perspective is always preeminently heavenly; He will not be contained. Here the personal experience of the Son of God is upheld, although the unbeliever cannot understand Him at this level, however intellectually brilliant he may be, viz Nicodemus.

ii His testimony is non-judgmental, v. 15.

"You judge according to the flesh. I am not judging anyone." The Pharisees' mindset was wholly concerned with external criteria (7:24), with regard to themselves and others. Their legal deliberations were of the letter

rather than spirit (II Cor. 3:6), of actions not motives, of the body not the soul, as just demonstrated concerning the adulterous woman. Nevertheless, we may be surprised that Jesus does not respond, “I am judging according to the Spirit.” Why? Certainly, as Carson suggests, “he does not judge anyone at all *the way his opponents do.*”³³ But surely more is intended; it is a matter of Christ’s unwavering focus on His earthly ministry. Yes, He will take on the role of a judge at the end of the age (Acts 17:30-31), but not now (3:17-18; 8:10; 12:47-48). He will speak mercy even to His enemies in the day of mercy while there is yet time.

b) The testimony of Jesus from His Father, vs. 16-18.

Suppose Jesus had condescended to bring external witnesses to His cause, such as the twelve disciples. Certainly He would have been laughed out of court; they would have been ridiculed. Hence, He maintains the high ground by calling attention to the Witness of all witnesses, God the Father Himself.

i His judgment is in association with the Father, v. 16.

“But even if I do judge, My judgment is true because I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me.” In other words, the judgment of Jesus is the judgment of God; the works of Jesus are the works of God; the declaration of Jesus is the declaration of God; thus, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). Hence for man here to put Jesus in the dock, as it were, to demand of Him witnesses, is insulting. You do not examine Jesus; you bow before Him. Certainly you are to listen to Him, to learn of Him, but it is nevertheless you who are under His merciful, righteous scrutiny, which is the scrutiny of God!

ii His judgment is biblical, v. 17.

“Even in your law it has been written that the witness of two men is true/valid.” Here Jesus responds to the challenge of v. 13, not out of necessity as a servant of the Law, but rather as its Lord (Mark 2:28), that is according to the perspective of the Lawgiver Himself! Thus Jesus employs the Law (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) according to the more significant, penetrating, original intent of its Author. “If we receive the testimony of men,

³³ Carson, *John*, p. 339.

the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. . . . And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (I John 5:9, 11). Nevertheless, by way of condescension, He identifies it as “your law,” belonging to the responsible custodians. Here the Master is putting the derelict delegates of Judaism to the test.

iii His judgment is supported by the Father, v. 18.

“I Myself am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.” Jesus’ own testimony has already been quite sufficient, v. 14. Nevertheless He will add the only other voice that has validity. In spite of Jesus’ remote appointment to earth from heaven, His supreme delight is the Father’s undoubted testimony of His Sonship/Messiahship, which is infinitely greater than any mere earthly witness. Consider the Father’s doting conversation with the Son in eternity past (3:35; 5:20); nothing on earth is remotely comparable. Since the Pharisees desire at least two witnesses, here is another the likes of which they are really incapable of comprehending (Matt. 17:5). Nevertheless, truth must prevail for the sake of posterity.

3) The invalidity of the Pharisees, v. 19.

“Therefore they were saying to Him, ‘Where is Your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know neither Me nor My Father. If you knew Me, you would know My Father also.’” There is probably a sneering tone here as well as a slur upon Jesus’ character. “Where is Your Father?” not “Who is Your Father?” may derisively enquire about Jesus’ Galilean upbringing, perhaps even rumors about his illegitimacy, cf. 6:42; 8:41. Here unholy man, in his spiritual darkness, as is often the case today, defiles the Holy One of God by means of his earthly conversation. Jesus seems to pick this up with His further profound comment.

a) “You know neither Me nor My Father,” and this has consequences, v. 24. Jesus judges the hearts of His hearers. “The Lord knows those who are His” (II Tim. 2:19), and He knows those who are not His! To those so proud of their high religious status this is a devastating indictment.

b) “If you knew Me, you would know My Father.” To know Jesus is to know His Father (5:37-38; 14:6). Clearly today man does not know God; in a world of futile searching, a void is obvious. Further, this “knowledge” of God is not known by discovery, but revelation. Yet are we not to “come unto Jesus” (Matt. 11:28)? Yes, but only in the sense of

coming to He who has first sought and loved us (I John 4:19).
As the hymn writer has explained:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I new
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of thee.

- c) The supreme issue, the touchstone, the hallmark of the knowledge of God is the knowledge of Jesus as the Father's Messiah and my Savior. Here is the answer to one of Job's vital questions (Job 11:7; 37:23): "Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? . . . The Almighty—*we* cannot find Him." But He can find us. To the question, "Where is God?" the answer of the Bible is, "He has come; His name is Immanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:23), to save us," and as Paul said on Mars Hill, "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). The disciples discovered this on the road to Emmaus when "their eyes were opened" (Luke 24:13-35; cf. John 6:44-45).
- 4) The validity of Jesus' ministry, v. 20.

"These words He spoke in the treasury while teaching in the temple; and no one seized Him because His hour had not yet come." These were "words" of "grace," v. 11, "light," v. 12, "truth," v. 14, "of the Father," v. 16. However, the sovereignty of God the Father in the ministry of Jesus Christ, God the Son, is something glorious to behold, especially in the face of strenuous opposition from the world. From the perspective of Jesus, He is wholly resigned to His earthly life being directed by His Father in heaven. He would readily sing the words of William Freeman Lloyd:

My times are in Thy hand
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul I leave
Entirely to Thy care.

My times are in Thy hand,
Whatever they may be,
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,
As best may seem to Thee.

My times are in Thy hand:
I'll always trust in Thee;
And, after death, at Thy right hand
I shall for ever be.

However the course of Jesus' life has a singular focus; everything else is preliminary, 2:4; 7:30; 8:20, that is until "the hour has come 12:23; 13:1; 17:1. Jesus has an appointment with destiny like no

other person; it is inevitable, ever before him, and even the unbelief of man, gathered in “the treasury” or Court of the Women area of the temple, cannot thwart its certain accomplishment. His “hour” is that confrontation with “the power of darkness” and its agents (Luke 22:52-53) over which he will triumph through the shedding of His blood and resurrection from death.

(2) His witness provokes unbelief and belief, vs. 21-30.

The Apostle Paul was in awe of his ministry when he wrote, “we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” (II Cor. 2:15-16). So his Master produced the same polarizing effect, cf. vs. 21-29 (unbelief), 30 (belief), concerning which there are consequences, death and life!

(a) Blinding unbelief, vs. 21-29.

When there is clarity of sight, an object need only be seen once to be comprehended. But when sight is dim, there is usually the necessity of repeated presentations of an object. When there is blindness, even repeated presentations prove useless. So Jesus, having earlier declared His imminent departure to His Father, and the exclusion of the unbelieving Jews in this regard, in 7:33-34, He again makes the same point though more aggressively.

1) Jesus’ departure is misunderstood, vs. 21-24.

The whole concept of Jesus’ going away involves two elements, namely the barrier of death that must be passed through, and the alternative destinations of being either expelled from the Father or united with the Father. Unbelief or belief determine either “dying in your sin” or “dying in grace,” that is being set free from sin’s condemnation. Certainly Jesus qualifies in being reunited with His Father, but what of the Jews, what of anyone in their sin (Job 25:4)? Clearly Jesus claims to be the gateway through the barrier of death into the Father’s presence; He eliminates sin’s condemnation. But for those who refuse His mediation, then their sin excludes them from residence with the Father. They “die in their sin,” they die having to account for their sin, they die with the prospect of judgment for their sin.

a) It is determinative, v. 21.

“Therefore He said to them again, ‘I go away and you will seek Me, and in your sin you will die. Where I am going you are not able to come.’” Jesus’ shrouded description of His death, burial and resurrection focuses on the hopeless, frustrating condition of the Jews. In your rigid unbelief “You

will seek me;” that is following my resurrection you will search for my body and not find it (Matt. 28:11-15). Because of your repudiation of the obvious, your stubborn refusal to believe that I am the risen Messiah, “you will die under the condemning weight of your sin. You will not go to heaven where I am; that is impossible. Rather you will go to the abode of ‘your father the devil,’” v. 44. Thus J. C. Ryle warns at thus juncture.

[H]ow awful is the end to which unbelief can bring men. . . . They are greatly mistaken who suppose that it is harsh and unkind to speak of hell and future punishment. How can such persons get over such language as that which is before us? How can they account for many a like expression which our Lord used, and specially for such passages as those in which He speaks of “the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched”? (Mark. 9:46). They cannot answer these questions. Misled by a false charity and a morbid amiability, they are condemning the plain teaching of Scripture, and are wise above that which is written.

Let us settle in our minds, as one of the great foundation truths of our faith, that there is a hell. Just as we believe that there is an eternal heaven for the godly, so let us believe firmly that there is an eternal hell for the wicked. Let us never suppose that there is any want [lack] of charity in speaking of hell. Let us rather maintain that it is the highest love to warn men plainly of danger, and to beseech them to “flee from the wrath to come.” It was Satan, the deceiver, murderer, and liar, who said to Eve in the beginning, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). To shrink from telling men, that except they believe they will “die in their sins,” may please the devil, but surely it cannot please God.³⁴

b) It is discredited, v. 22.

“Therefore the Jews were saying, ‘Surely he will not kill himself, will He, because He says, ‘Where I am going you are not able to come.’?” Remember that here Jesus addresses Jewish fundamentalists who did believe in a future world under the glorious reign of Messiah. But they also assumed their qualification for entrance, and this was a fatal error that Jesus addressed with shocking frankness. He has already declared, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come,” v. 22. Why can’t they go to heaven with Jesus? Because of their sin. The same fatal error is made today by droves of professing

³⁴ Ryle, *John*, II, pp. 101-102.

Christians. They assume they will have entrance into heaven when in fact it will be denied to them (Matt. 7:22-23; 22:11-14; 25:7-13; Luke 13:25-28), on account of their barren spiritual condition. Here we are made aware of the chasm of understanding that confronts Jesus. It is not unlike that which the learned Nicodemus personified (3:3-10). It is a blindness to heavenly truth because of the blinding influence of this world.

The difficulty of the Jews in *not* understanding where Jesus is *going* is based upon their *not* understanding of where He is *from*, that is the Father as His Son, vs. 16, 18. Hence, suicide is the flippant, implied suggestion, as if He was crazy enough to consider such an option, though a negative answer is expected. Of course such an idea, more Greek than Jewish,³⁵ is quite wrong, yet ironically it contains a measure of truth (10:18; 11:49-50).

c) It is heavenly, v. 23.

“And He was saying to them, ‘You are of those from below [κάτω, katō]; I am of those from above [ἄνω, anō]. You are of this world; I Myself am not of this world.’” The personal pronouns are emphatic in portraying a vast gulf. Here Jesus defines the chasm that separates Himself from the religious Jews, indeed all religious people, after the manner of Isaiah 55:8-9, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” The fundamental problem is man’s subjection to the world, and resultant paralysis by, captivity under, and blindness to this sphere. As Ryle explains Jesus’ words:

Your minds are entirely absorbed and buried in earth and objects of a mere earthly kind. . . . The expression “of this world” means bound up with, and inseparably connected, by tastes, aims, and affections, with this world, and nothing else but this world. It is the character of one utterly dead and graceless, who looks at nothing but the world, and lives for it.³⁶

Here man’s fundamental problem is spatially illustrated, though it involves moral/spiritual dimensions. Indeed Jesus may well be declaring that the unbelieving Jews are “from below, hellish” and He is “from above, heavenly.” As Carson well states:

³⁵ Morris, *Reflections on John*, pp. 310-311.

³⁶ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 105.

The contrast is not between a spiritual world and a material world (John is not a neoplatonist), but between the realm of God himself and the realm of his fallen and rebellious creation, the ‘world’ which hates Jesus because he testifies that ‘what it does is evil.’³⁷

The only hope for man is that he “see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51). It is Jesus alone who bridges the chasm.

d) It is decisive, v. 24.

“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe [and it is unlikely that you will] that I Myself am [ἐγώ, εἰμι, egō eimi], you will die in your sins.” Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews, could not be more emphatic that He is the “I Am” of God, His promised Anointed One, even as He will confirm in v. 58. The Jewish audience would well understand the association with Exodus 3:13-15 where God reveals Himself to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” . . . “thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.” . . . “This is My name forever, and this is my memorial-name to all generations.” Others have suggested that the reference is to Isaiah 40-55 (especially 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; cf. also Deut. 32:39),³⁸ though the end result concerning Jesus’ claim to deity is the same.

As Jew and Gentile are “under sin” (Rom. 3:9), so the only hope for any Jew in “sin,” v. 21, or “sins,” here, or Gentile for that matter, is to believe in Jesus as his only mediatorial remedy for sin. We must know our disease and acknowledge it, and we must then know our only remedy, and deliver our soul to Him, to Jesus for cleaning, the only bridge over troubled waters.

2) Jesus’ person is misunderstood, vs. 25-29.

One common modern idiom is the expression, “Hello there,” in which a person is addressed as if he or she was mentally vacant, not listening or paying attention. So Jesus might well use such jargon at this juncture when confronted with the mental paralysis that human religion has inflicted upon the Jewish leaders. Usually the problem is not so much a lack of comprehension as a blinding presupposition or agenda that gets in the way. Say what we will, it seems that rational penetration is near impossible, that is apart from divine intervention, whereby cold stone is turned to vital flesh.

³⁷ Carson, *John*, p. 342.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

- a) His speaking is not heard, v. 25.

“Therefore they were saying to Him, ‘Who are You?’ Jesus said to them, ‘What have I been saying to you from the beginning?’” Is the attitude here one of ignorance or impudence or imbecility? Whatever, plainly the need here is more than a clear, rational explanation. The preceding mountain of evidence in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, spanning over two years, has been overwhelming. Even the response of the Son of God seems to indicate incredulity, as if nothing much more could be said. “Hello there,” well might Jesus say. “Is anyone home, or is the building vacant?” No, but it is full of darkness! After all, from the commencement of Jesus’ ministry there has been a consistent, unambiguous, demonstrable testimony that has been unashamedly messianic, spectacularly divine.

- b) His judgment is not acknowledged, v. 26.

“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true, and what things I have heard from Him, these things I speak to the world.” Hence Jesus will not be dictated to in terms of providing yet further, unnecessary explanation according to man’s terms. True, He will further explain Himself, though this will be in the language of judgment that responds to unbelief. For the present He will reiterate His unqualified commitment to His vocation according to His Father’s appointment. If the Jews stumble at Jesus’ plain testimony, they in fact stumble at the very words of God the Father given to God the Son; Jesus will not modify or deviate from that witness for the sake of pandering to symptoms of blind prejudice.

- c) His Father is not recognized, v. 27.

“They did not know/understand that He had spoken to them about the Father.” So John editorializes on the impasse that has come about between the Jews and Jesus. His claim to a heavenly origin is passed over; it is simply not comprehended, in spite of the most clear declarations, 5:16-30, 36-37. Also the problem of entrenched unbelief has been plainly stated, 5:37-38, 42, 44; 8:19. Here is fulfilled the saying of the prophets, “O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes and do not see; who have ears but do not hear” (Jer. 5:21; cf. Isa. 6:9; 43:8; Ezek. 12:2; Matt. 13:13-17). Here are represented those who know Scripture and yet are ignorant of Scripture.

d) His redemption is not comprehended, v. 28.

“Therefore Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [the promised divine Messiah], and of Myself I do nothing, but just as the Father taught Me, these things I speak.’ So Jesus addresses those who will crucify Him because of their blindness toward heaven and their narrow focus on themselves (5:43-44). The situation here is similar to that concerning Jesus’ earlier refusal to Pharisees in Galilee to perform further signs, except “the sign of Jonah” (Matt. 12:38-40). So here, Jesus is saying, “Enough is enough!” At the “lifting up” (3:14), the crucifixion of Israel’s Messiah by Israel, then shall the attending wonders (Matt. 27:51-54) and resurrection make plain that which is inescapable; at this occasion blindness will and must yield to that which is undeniable. They will seek for a body and not find it, v. 21. They will be faced with the fact that Peter will proclaim, “Men of Israel, . . . Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him, . . . this Man . . . you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death” (Acts 2:23). So Jesus here declares this same truth; His Father has appointed this atoning work which will be victorious over the worst of man’s unbelief.

e) His mission is not discerned, v. 29

“And He who sent Me is with Me; He does not leave Me alone because I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.” Here Jesus does not expect to be fully understood; that will come later. However, for the record, His Father hears and is well pleased at His Son’s unwavering faithfulness. Jesus’ commitment to His appointed earthly vocation, even when His hour of suffering is imminent, is wholly anchored in the details of His Father’s plan of redemption, the completion of it, the fruitfulness of it, the glory of it. He will not be detoured from it. Jesus is obsessed with the will of His Father.

(b) Emancipating belief, v. 30.

“While He was speaking these things, many believed in Him.” So Jesus gains the devotion of “many” who had attended the feast of tabernacles. Most likely the majority were common people, while few were of the leadership. So the “division” amongst the crowds of Jerusalem continued (7:43). But what of the quality of this “faith”? What was the content of this faith? As Ryle rightly states that there is “no reason to think that the ‘belief’ here was anything more than a head belief that our Lord was the Messiah.”³⁹ Jesus, in knowing their hearts

³⁹ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 112.

(2:23-25), was not so impressed. After all, it is faith over the long haul that counts. it is faith in the truth that counts. it is faith that evidences emancipation from unbelief and sin that counts, as Jesus now makes clear in vs. 31-32.

b. The witness of Jesus to the demands of discipleship, vs. 31-47.

To begin with, Jesus' expectation of genuine belief in Him is defined in terms of "discipleship," and not some momentary expression of faith. A "disciple," μαθητής, mathētēs, was essentially a "learner/pupil," hence a "follower" so that truth might be embraced and loyalty developed toward the teaching received and the teacher. It was expected that such loyalty on the part of the pupil would result in his growth into the likeness of his teacher (13:35; 15:5, 8, 14). In other words, discipleship is evident allegiance.

(1) The evidence of true discipleship, vs. 31-38.

Jesus is well aware that those who show some interest in Him may be distinguished as "disciples" and "true disciples," even as there are "Christians" and "true Christians," or "believers" and "true believers." Hence He is concerned with making the distinction very clear. It is the difference between outward confessional form and heartfelt substance, an external as distinct from an internal relationship with Jesus Christ.

(a) Persevering faith that emancipates, vs. 31-33.

Thus the proof of a true disciple of Jesus Christ will depend upon performance; and performance will depend upon dynamic; and dynamic will depend upon the nourishment of the soul; and that which best nourishes the soul is, according to Jesus own prescription, "My word."

1) True disciples persevere in the Word of Christ, v. 31.

"Therefore Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide/continue in My word, truly you are My disciples.'" But what specifically is "My word"? It is not simply general ethical maxims, superior principles for daily living. Consider 5:24; 14:23, also 8:37, 43, 51-52, but especially 8:55; 17:6, 14, 17. Jesus' word is the Word of God! It is the truth from Jesus concerning His divine person, His heaven-sent commission, and His gospel that saves sinners, having come from His Father to do His will. Hence Jesus' passion becomes the passion of His true disciples; they continue in Christ's word because, as Peter declared, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (6:68). So the Jewish officers testified, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks" 7:46). It is this soul arresting perception that generates perseverance. In other words, the true disciple takes Jesus' profound, incomparable claims so seriously that he forsakes

all in following Him. Jesus has earlier stated this principle (Luke 14:26-27, 33). Such consecration results in perseverance.

2) True disciples are emancipated by the Word of Christ, v. 32.

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free/emancipate you.” The cost of discipleship is total, but the result is priceless treasure. Of course the presumption here is that of error and sin that result in bondage. And the remedy for this captivity is “the truth” that brings about liberation, deliverance. And this “truth” is not an abstract concept, as is commonly portrayed such as in *Ann of Green Gables*, but the liberating truth that Jesus Christ speaks concerning Himself, His mission, and the saving will of His Father, even as Paul teaches (Rom. 6:16-17).

Hence what is it to be free? The Prodigal Son sought freedom away from his father and yet the result was bondage in the pig pens of the far country. Back in his Father’s house his former bondage became liberty. People seek sexual freedom and find themselves chained by depravity, but in marriage there is liberty. A society that grants freedom to the evil-doer finds itself under the tyranny of the evil doer. However Katherine Lee Bates wrote of a better society.

America! America!
God mend thy every flaw
Confirm they soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law.

So John Bunyan wrote in his *Prison Meditations*:

I am, indeed in prison now
In body, but my mind
Is free to study Christ, and how
Unto me he is kind.
For though men keep my outward man
Within their locks and bars,
Yet by the faith of Christ I can
Mount higher than the stars.
Their fetters cannot spirits tame,
Nor tie up God from me;
My faith and hope they cannot lame,
Above them I shall be⁴⁰.

Liberty is ultimately a state of mind. Another hymn writer has well described freedom as Jesus Christ defines it in these words:

⁴⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 64.

Make me a captive, Lord,
 And then I shall be free;
 Force me to render up my sword,
 And I shall conqueror be.
 I sink in life's alarms
 When by myself I stand;
 Imprison me within Thine arms,
 And strong shall be my hand.

Absolute freedom is really an impossible concept. We all live under certain constraints; for instance we are free to walk, but not to fly; we are free to live yet limited by our distinctive genetic structure. Freedom is the enjoyment of a prescribed universe. For Jesus Christ there is the universe of this world and sin; if you are part of it by citizenship, you are held captive by its dominion; you have the freedom of the pig pen. But there is also the universe of heaven and the righteousness of God; if your citizenship is there, then you are held captive by its dominion, and happily so; you have the blessed freedom of the kingdom of God.

Romans 14:17 makes the distinction clear: “[F]or the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Of course the citizen of the pig pen is blind to his captivity; his only problem is his frustration in not being able to really enjoy his filth, to wallow in it peacefully, because it is attended with so much mixed temporal pleasure and pain. But for the true child of God, his emancipation from the pig pen is radical; now by means of the truth of Jesus Christ he is free from Satan’s claims; he is free through Christ yet gloriously enslaved to Christ.

3) False disciples disclaim the need of emancipation, v. 33.

“They answered to Him, ‘Seed [σπέρμα, sperma] of Abraham, we are, and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How [is it] you say that, ‘Free [men] you shall become.’?’” The Jews quickly and rightly concluded that Jesus was strongly intimating that they were subject to some form of bondage or slavery. Here proud resentment is aroused as well as an unbelievable response. After all, Israel had suffered under a succession of Egyptian, Babylonian, Media-Persian, Greek, and Roman captors. Nevertheless rabbinic teaching upheld a princely self-assessment. Even so there are none so blind as those who protest that they can see! Judas must have frequently professed spiritual sight. So Ryle rightly comments: “The power of self-deception in unconverted man is infinite.”⁴¹ This common contradiction of human nature becomes even more frighteningly clear in 9:39-41.

⁴¹ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 118.

However the blindness here is further apparent in the puffed up claim of carnal lineage with Abraham. The boast is emphatic, “Seed of Abraham, we are! [We are the salt of the earth!; we are the elect of God!]” (cf. “Abraham is our Father,” Matt. 3:9; John 8:37, 39). It is as if we declared today: “We are Christians, church members living respectable lives and not involved in gross sin,” even though we in fact slander on the telephone, hold long-standing grudges, crave after worldly possessions and recognition, and are full of self-centeredness (II Pet. 2:17-19)! Here is the worst slavery of all, religious slavery. In contrast with mere physical incarceration, it is unconscious slavery of the soul that will be exposed at the last day. It is the freedom of this world, which captivity will end in participation in the judgment of this world.

(b) Persevering faith in the Emancipator, vs. 34-36.

Again we remind ourselves that there is no such concept as absolute freedom. There must always be boundaries. However when a man declares his desire to be free, we should also ask him, “What do you want to do with this freedom?” He usually wants freedom to do certain things. Jesus Christ is well aware of this fact, but particularly man’s desire for freedom either to do what is the righteous will of God or freedom to do his own independent, godless will. This is Jesus’ single concern here. Many a person today wants freedom, but it is the freedom to sin untroubled, without restraint and condemnation, “to do his own thing,” to order his life on “his own terms.”

1) The bondage of the sinner to sin, v. 34.

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you that whoever is practicing sin is the slave of sin.’” Here then is a very significant principle. The present tense here is important (cf. I John 3:8-9) since it refers to a lifestyle, a habitual way of life, not simply one sinful act. Now a slave always has a master whose command is to do his will. When we agree to this master’s dictates, we accept his dominion. Thus what we do indicates our willing subservience to the agenda of our master (Rom. 6:16). Thus Jesus is teaching that your lifestyle identifies your master, either “sin” or “righteousness;” that is, where you invest indicates the interest of your heart (Matt. 6:21). In other words, our affections will set the course of our actions. And our affections indicate the willing servitude of our soul. If we are “committing sin,” whatever our ethical platitudes, we are declaring our master to be sin, and this was the condition of the Jews that Jesus was making painfully clear.

2) The contrast between the slave and the son, v. 35.

“The slave does not reside in the house forever; the son does reside [in the house] forever.” Here Jesus uses an illustration, perhaps a

well known maxim (cf. Matt. 17:25; Gal. 4:22-31; Heb. 3:1-6). “The slave” here represents the Jews in the present, as if Jesus said:

At present, living under the bondage of the ceremonial law, and content with it and Pharisaic traditions, you are no better than slaves and servants, liable, like Hagar and Ishmael, to be cast out of God’s favor and presence at any moment.⁴²

But who is “the son”?⁴³ He represents what the Jews ought to be, as if Jesus said:

Receiving Me, and believing on Me as the Messiah, you would at once be lifted to the position of sons, and would abide for ever in God’s favor, as adopted children and dear sons and daughters.—You know yourselves that the servant has no certain tenure in the house, and may be cast out at any time; while the son is heir to the father, and has a certain tenure in the house forever.—Know that I wish you to be raised from the relation of servants to that of sons. Now, under the bondage you are in, you are like slaves. Receiving Me and my Gospel you would become children and free.⁴⁴

3) The Son’s emancipation of the sinners, v. 36.

“Therefore if the Son shall liberate you/make you free [from ongoing servitude to sin], you will really [ὄντως, ontōs] be free [men].” Since the fall of man, he has been in bondage to his corruption both individually and socially. His sinful nature has set the course of his affections. However only the liberty that Jesus Christ purchased has led to both individual and social liberty. Western society has been distinctively characterized as fostering freedom for the simple reason that its heritage is that of biblical Christianity, especially that which found revival through the seventeenth century Reformation. It was then that recovery of the Gospel led to Europe’s emancipation, both religious and civil. Today Europe is reverting to bondage. Two of Luther’s primary and most influential works published in 1520, were *The Babylonian Captivity* which reduced the sacraments from seven to two, and *The Freedom of the Christian Man*. Here then is Jesus Christ’s manifesto of true human liberty by which there is brought about emancipation from the scourge of religious slavery. Here is the reason why Jesus Christ has come (Isa. 42:6-7; 61:1; Luke 4:16-21). Paul takes up this principle in Galatians by warning us that in obtaining gospel liberty we must be careful to maintain

⁴² Ibid., p. 120.

⁴³ So Alford, Hendriksen, Lenski, Morris, Plummer. However Barrett and Carson argue that “son” here refers to Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

gospel liberty (Gal. 5:1), that is by Christ, in Christ, and under Christ.

(2) The evidence of counterfeit discipleship, vs. 38-47.

We now see strong, offensive inference in Jesus' words at the conclusion of v. 38 that all the more arouses the hackles of the Jews. Abrahamic paternity is everything to the Jew, so that for Jesus to declare it evidently invalid is to further aggravate an inflamed situation. The Son of God retains the compassion of Matthew 23:37, nevertheless this physician of souls must expose known corruption to the patient before there is any possibility of remedial treatment. Unfortunately the patient protests at the outrageous, painful diagnosis of this doctor, who he declares to be quite unacceptable and thus should be disqualified.

(a) Perverse faith in the devil, vs. 37-38.

One aspect of freedom that Jesus now focuses on is the arena of our paternity that is evidenced by our performance rather than profession. Sometimes you observe a vase of flowers and wonder if they are real. The only way to be sure is to touch and feel and smell and look for the evidence of life and growth, even paternity. A label is not sufficient. Hence we expect the genuine flower to be the result of genuine birth and growth, not clever, artificial reproduction. The Bible repeatedly upholds the principle of like producing like (Matt. 7:16-20; Rom. 5:12, 19), but it is a principle that is especially significant with regard to Jesus' teaching on the authentication of children of God (I John 3:9-10). A world of counterfeits demands it!

1) The Word of Christ is inconsistent with carnal religion, v. 37.

"I know that 'seed of Abraham,' you are [as you put it]; but you seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you." Man has often placed considerable value upon "breeding" or "blood lines," and the Jews especially placed great emphasis upon physical lineage, ascribing merit and blessing to those who were thus related to Abraham.⁴⁵ Hence, supposedly, good breeding produced good behavior, except that it did not always work out this way, as with Jacob, Eli, David (Absalom), Jehosaphat (Ahaziah), Hezekiah (Manasseh), Josiah (Jehoiakim), etc. So here with the Jews; their physical connection with Abraham was not in parallel with the faith and virtue of Abraham.

However the Old Testament did not uphold the efficacy of mere carnal dependency since Esau, born of Abraham, yet was not an heir of the promise of God (Gen. 21:9-10; cf. Rom. 9:6-7; Gal. 21-31). Thus for Paul, a true Jew was one principally of inward as well as outward circumcision (Rom. 2:28-29). Nevertheless, the

⁴⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, pp. 271-272.

Jews lost sight of the priority of a circumcised heart. Reversion to carnality always leads to concentration upon outward form (that nevertheless ought not be eliminated), increasing blindness, and this is what Jesus now addresses.

Hence, in contradistinction to the admirable lifestyle of Abraham, Jesus charges the Jews with being shameless murderers, a fact which appears to have become common knowledge among the people (7:1, 25, cf. 7:32; 8:20, 59), even for some time (5:18). Surely Abraham would disown such uncircumcised behavior.

What was the cause of this blatant hypocrisy, further illustrated in I John 3:15? It was the fact that the word of Christ had “no place” in them. The word *χωρέω*, *chōreō*, here means “to go forward, make progress.” The point is that the word of Jesus, His gospel message from His Father, had lodged in the vestibule of their souls (8:30?), but made no effective entrance.⁴⁶ As “the unfolding of Your words gives light” (Ps. 119:130; cf. Prov. 6:23; John 8:12) and cleanses (John 15:3), so its absence through lack of penetration results in darkness (I John 2:11), that is murderous, deceitful deeds of darkness. Here, the potential of the natural human heart, void of Christ, is plainly taught by Christ. And how many there are who, while having Christ’s word on file for reference in the mere porch of their soul, yet know nothing of its invading, possessing, cleansing illumination.

2) The Word of Christ is consistent with His Father. 38.

“What I have seen with the Father I speak, therefore also with you, what you heard from [your/the] father you do.” Now Jesus raises the issue of distinctive paternity that leads to the destruction of the common notion of the universal fatherhood of God. All men are *not* the children of God in a saving sense (cf. Acts 17:27-29). Rather there is the Father of Jesus and the father of lies, v. 44, two contrasting realms that divide the allegiance of the human race. The Jews are now being led to the astounding truth that their parentage is not what they claim; they are illegitimate.

On the one hand there is the Father who Jesus has “seen” in His being “with” His Father, even in His bosom, 1:1, 18. On the other hand there is the father of perverted, Pharisaic Judaism, even “your father the devil. . . . He was a murderer from the beginning. . . . There is no truth in him. . . . He is a liar and the father of lies,” v. 41. And the proof of this assertion is a correspondence in lifestyle. “You do the things which you heard from your father,” v. 38. “You are seeking to kill Me,” v. 40. “You want to do the desires of your father [the devil],” v. 44. In other words, the “like

⁴⁶ Lightfoot, *John*, pp. 134-135; Ryle, *John*, II, p. 127.

father, like son,” principle is an infallible guide with regard to alternative parentage.

There is the “seed of the serpent” and the “seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15). There is the seed of “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). And there is the seed of “the woman clothed with the sun,” . . . and “she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. . . . [H]er children . . . keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:1, 5, 17). There is the seed of those who “boast in the flesh,” formal, pharisaic religionists, who give birth to carnal children who produce “the deeds of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21; 6:12). And there are those who “belong to Christ . . . [and are] Abraham’s descendants [seed], heirs according to promise,” who signify their breeding with “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:29; 5:22-23). Paternity is a most vital matter, but we must be sure that it is validated, that the begotten have true birth-marks, evident hallmarks of God’s workmanship (Eph. 2:10).

(b) A lack of godly breeding, vs. 39-41a.

It common to argue today, “If it runs like a dog, barks like a dog, smells like a dog, and has a cold nose like a dog, it most likely is a dog.” Apart from a mere title then, it is a collection of characteristics that really define an animal. So Jesus uses the same line of reasoning with regard to those Jews who designated themselves as Jews because of physical lineage with Abraham. He verifies the proper relationship between faith and works, even as James 2:18-26. True faith bares good fruit; no fruit or bad fruit indicate illegitimacy. Thus, “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (15:14).

1) A false Abrahamic paternity, v. 39.

“They answered and they said to Him, ‘Our father is Abraham.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are children of Abraham, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham.’” While there has been much contemporary argument as to the definition of Jew, here Jesus gives clarification. He is one who not only is a physical descendant of Abraham, but also is characterized by the obedience of faith of Abraham. In other words, in being physically related to Abraham, the true Jew is validated by means of his reflection of the virtue of Abraham (Gen. 26:5), especially his joyful anticipation of Christ, v. 56. The expectation and likeness of fruit, with regard to its root, is an inevitable corollary, though such a principle is anathema to the hypocrite.

2) A false Abrahamic morality, v. 40.

“But now you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has spoken the truth to you which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do.” Jesus is ever mindful of His being a Son having come to fulfill the commission of His Father. As such He has scrupulously spoken only that which His Father required of Him. Thus He may be alluding to the Parable of the Landowner, soon to be revealed during Passion Week, in which the son was eventually sent to receive produce that the hired vine-growers had refused to release. Upon His appearing, the vine-growers declared: “Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance” (Matt. 21:38). Indeed Jesus has come from the abode of Abraham, vs. 56-58; it is unthinkable that the patriarch would participate in such a murderous plot since he has, by faith alone, believed in Christ (Rom. 4:1-5).

3) A true devilish morality, v. 41a.

“You are doing the deeds of your father.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Notwithstanding *your* present religious status, *your* recitations of the Shema, *your* father is not My Father; *you* are not of My lineage, nor that of Abraham. *Your* claim concerning Abraham is fraudulent, illegitimate.” The Jews now have no misunderstanding with regard to Jesus’ assertion. They are inwardly boiling with rage at such a bold revelation of their ugly nakedness. Those proud and highly pedigreed in their religion find it excruciatingly painful when their phoniness is exposed. Here is but a foretaste of the sheer horror of the day of judgment when “the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts” (I Cor. 4:5).

(c) A lack of respect for Jesus, v. 41b.

“We were not born of fornication [πορνεία, porneia]. One father we have, [even] God.” Now the response becomes nastier than ever, even slanderous. It borders on being guilty of the unpardonable sin, v. 48 (Matt. 12:24-32). Perhaps the Jews have taken Jesus’ criticism as a charge of pastoral unfaithfulness, likened in the Old Testament to the forsaking of Jehovah, spiritual adultery, in which case they deny “spiritual fornication.”⁴⁷ The choice for the Jews here is one of either unqualified confession and repentance, “Yes, you are right about us; hence we cry to you for mercy, O Son of God,” or outrageous defamation and malicious condemnation. The latter attitude prevails in which the matter of Jesus’ scandalous earthly paternity is surely raised in a public gathering; with sneering innuendo it concerns a supposed “virgin birth,” in contrast with their impeccable loyalty to the Shema.

⁴⁷ Morris, *John*, p. 462; Ryle, *John*, II, p. 129; cf. Jer. 2:1-20; 3:1-3.

- (d) A lack of love for Jesus, v. 42.

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God was your Father [and in reality He is not], you would love Me [and you don’t], for I proceeded forth [aorist, historic occurrence, Gal. 4:4] and have come from God. For I have not come on My own initiative, but that One [He] sent Me.’” Jesus is “rock solid” in his response to such character assassination. There is unity in the family of God between the Father and His Son, and consequently the children of God. However, the touchstone in the earthly sphere is the “love of Jesus,” which in turn is the determinant as to whether there is genuine spiritual knowledge of God the Father (5:20, 23; I John 5:1). Hence circumcision, nationality, baptism, church affiliation are not the issue. Rather, we should more deeply enquire, “Why” should we love Jesus as He requires, as the Son of His Father? The answer is given in I John 4:19. And how did he first love us? Ask the paralytic (Matt. 9:2), the woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:47-48), the man born blind (John 9:6-7, 35-38). For the sake of His audience in general, He even seems to be intimating how true spiritual paternity is obtained.

- (e) A lack of spiritual perception, v. 43.

“Therefore why do you not know/comprehend what My speech/utterance [τὴν λαλίαν, tēn lalian] is about? Because you are not able to hear My word.” John Bunyan illustrates the problem here when Christian and Faithful pass through Vanity Fair. Of the citizens there,

few could understand what they said; they naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the fair were the men of this world; so that from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians each to the other.⁴⁸

Jesus naturally speaks the word of heaven concerning familiar conversation with His Father. His audience has the accumulation of worldly wax in its ears that restricts hearing. Only the particular surgery of Jesus can cleanse the hearing faculty; the problem is with the audience, not the communicator. The Jews hear words, but cannot comprehend the truth; there is some resonance without receptivity. This was the point of v. 37 where Jesus said, “My word has no place in you,” it remains in the vestibule of your soul but makes no real, transforming entrance. Only the melting warmth of grace can dissolve and cleanse the problem so that truth may make an abiding entrance.

- (f) A lack of truth embrace, vs. 44-47.

In parallel with the emphasis of vs. 32 where it is “truth” that transforms and emancipates, so the antitheses of “truth” and “error” are forcefully presented by Jesus as being at the heart of the problem. This is a key priority in this Gospel (1:14, 17; 5:33; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17;

⁴⁸ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 128.

18:37-38), and so relevant for times when truth is subordinated to experience, sensation, subjective opinion. However, as Morris points out, “truth” is expected to have practical, ethical consequences (3:21).⁴⁹

1) Allegiance to falsehood, v. 44.

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do/eagerly yearn after the desires of your father. That one was a murderer from the beginning and he does not stand [as rooted] in the truth because truth is not in him. When he speaks [the?] lie, he speaks of his own [nature/character, Matt. 12:34] because he is a liar and its father.” This is a devastating denunciation of such religious aristocrats, which proves that not all men have God for their father. But further, the devil is severely censured in being homicidal from the beginning of humanity. He brought death to the totality of Adam’s race through seductive lies (Gen. 3:1-5), even as Cain proved the contagion of the resultant disease (I John 3:12). Here Jesus summarizes the fundamental predicament of this depraved universe which so flies in the face of secular humanism and evolutionary perfectability. According to the truth of Christ here, that predicament is the real personal polarity of good and evil, God and Satan, truth and error, on which hinges the establishment of good government, the rule of law, and family life. Denial here, by means of relativism, subjectivism, materialism, results in societal chaos, moral bankruptcy. So Ryle rightly comments:

[H]ow strongly and directly our Lord rebukes His enemies. There are times when strong condemnation becomes a positive duty, and we must not refrain from it through fear of being charged with severity, personality, and harshness.⁵⁰

It should also not be lost sight of that the antitheses of “truth” and “error” here distinctively focus on the truth of Christ, His person and work, in contrast with the error of slander that has just been so blatant in v. 41. So in vs. 32, 36 it is the truth about Christ that sets free; in v. 48 it is the further slanderous lie about Christ, resulting in His attempted murder, v. 59, that results in consignment of these children to the same hellish destiny as that of their father! This is why Jesus addressed the Jewish leaders: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?” (Matt. 23:33). Hence belief or unbelief in Jesus Christ is not a mere matter of Sunday conjecture, a casual reflection. It concerns the most influential, controversial, inescapable, polarizing individual in all of human history, and there is no possibility of fence-sitting. There are eternal consequences at stake.

⁴⁹ Morris, *Reflections on John*, pp. 334-335.

⁵⁰ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 134.

2) Aversion to incarnate truth, vs. 45-46.

When disputation becomes personal and the truth in question is subordinated to personal animosity, then a disputant will be assailed whatever truth he may present. Here legitimate argument degenerates to irrational, *ad hominem* criticism. So Jesus finds himself assailed, whatever He says.

a) That which is spoken, v. 45.

“But because I [emphatic] speak the truth, you do not believe Me.” The truth has been explained by Jesus from numerous perspectives concerning *who* He is, from *where* He has come, *why* He has come, and *where* He is going. Nevertheless, in spite of a holy demeanor and validating works, the hatred of the Jews is intractable. Of course such an attitude is born of their disregard for the truth; it is of little importance compared with their personal agenda and advancement, come what may. Such people “suppress the truth in unrighteousness;” they “exchange the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:18, 25). A clever lawyer may obtain a desired verdict if truth is shunted to one side or obfuscated; truth is often a casualty when our interests are at stake. Here is the reason for much unbelief. The truth concerning Jesus is often conveniently pushed aside because we desire a self-serving conclusion.

b) That which cannot be refuted, v. 46.

“Whoever of you convicts/accuses [ἐλέγχω, elenchō] Me concerning sin? If I speak truth, why does anyone of you not believe Me?” To raise the stakes concerning the validity of the truth which he has declared and is under question, Jesus addresses the matter of his own personal integrity. Truth does not flow from a corrupt vessel. So he boldly challenges his audience with regard to His integrity as a vehicle of truth. His first question, asked before a large crowd, expects a negative answer which comes forth with deafening silence. As an honorary “Rabbi” (3:2; 6:25), Jesus’ character remains unimpeachable, or better, impeccable, and more so than is presently grasped. Hence, His next question is a logical consequence. If a clean vessel has conveyed the truth, then what sense is it to spurn such a reliable testimony? Of course the logic here seems good, but then what of the vessel receiving this truth? If it is unclean, does it welcome the truth? Again, the problem of communication is not with Jesus the broadcaster, but rather the polluted listening audience!

- (g) A lack of godly interest, v. 47.

“He who is of God hears the words of God; on account of this you do not hear [the words of God] because you are not of God [unclean vessels].” The issue here is not how a person who is “not of God” becomes “of God,” but rather the shameful contradiction and pretense of those who, like the Jews here, claim to be “of God” who in fact are “not of God.”

What is it, according to Jesus, to be “of God”? In simple terms it is to be an authentic child of God, in union with Him, who loves His Son. Hence Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Consequently to hear Jesus’ word is to “hear the words of God” (cf. 8:31, 42; I John 3:10; 4:2-3; 4:6-8; 5:19; II John 9; III John 11).

However, all of the pretended religiosity in the world with its trappings, its terminology, its posturing, its charade, its worldly recognition, is no substitute for hearing the Good Shepherd, yielding to His oversight, and following in His steps. And this phony religiosity will not take kindly to its exposure as a fraud; it will savagely bite back, attempting to devour and destroy, even as now.

- c. The witness of Jesus to His sovereignty over death, vs.48-59.

Now even more truth about Jesus’ preexistence, his relation to Abraham and His deity, is boldly declared by Jesus. And the more astonishing the truth is that Jesus reveals concerning aspects of his person, the more the heat of this conflict increases on the part of outraged opposition. In other words, the more truth and light about Jesus that are expounded from His lips, the more the error and darkness embodied in the Jews’ religiosity rises up in opposition. Thus the truth of 1:5 continues to be vividly portrayed: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome/overpower it [in spite of strenuous attempts].”

- (1) Jesus is sovereign over the children of the devil, vs. 48-50.

So here the slanderous character of the darkness is more shamelessly described. When the power of truth cannot be directly opposed, then the only recourse is defamation of character, a smear campaign, character assassination. Even today, the character of Jesus is regularly maligned, especially by liberal misrepresentation that tolerates only His humanity.

- (a) Their demonic slander, v. 48.

“The Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do not we correctly say that You are a Samaritan and have a demon? [yes we do].’” In other words, Jesus is smeared as a defiled half-breed, a mongrel, a child of hell, a fiend, in spite of the absence of any evidence. The intense hostility here knows no limit; sinning against the witness of the Holy Spirit is of no concern (Matt. 12:24-32). Meet these religious leaders on their own and they will appear most civil and virtuous (Matt. 23:3); but in their hearts

is bitter enmity. The real problem is that Jesus, by the light of his holy presence, let alone His words, exposes and judges their ungodliness. So “everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed (3:19-20).

Here is further explanation as to why it is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ. The reason is that we are not neutral ourselves; our nature has a definite bias toward rebellion against God. Then when the holy God appears, that is by means of His holy Son, it is impossible for our response to be neutral. When Jesus Christ confronts us, even without saying a word we stand condemned by the purity of His presence.

(b) Their divine rebuke, v. 49.

“Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father and you dishonor Me.’” With considerable self-control, Jesus coolly repudiates his assailants. Truth must confront error. Notice how Jesus does not declare: “I honor My Father and you dishonor Him”! Certainly man does dishonor God, however he demonstrates this by his dishonoring of His Son. Jesus speaks this way because the relationship with His Father is spontaneous, intimate. In a nutshell then the great issue concerns whether we will confess our rebellion to the Visitation of God, or justify ourselves by means of discrediting Jesus the Visitor, that is by denial of His uniqueness, by merely patronizing His humanity, instead of casting ourselves at His feet trusting only in His divine mercy. This was the case with the Syrophoenician woman, a Gentile, who cried out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David” (Matt. 15:22), concerning her demon-possessed daughter, and consequently she received mercy. The Jews here opt for insulting God by means of strenuous opposition to “the Angel of His presence [the Angel of Jehovah] . . . [who] redeemed them, and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old” (Isa. 63:9).

(c) Their divine defeat, v. 50.

“But I do not seek my glory. There is the One who seeks and judges.” A good son is jealous in the main for the accolade of his father, and not that of others. So Jesus is very sensitive to any misunderstanding that might result from His prior charge that, “You dishonor Me.” He could be misinterpreted. He wants it understood that his criticism was not the result of his principal desire for the approval of the Jews, as if for personal satisfaction. In the ministry of Jesus there is only one all-consuming interest, namely the righteous will of His Father (4:34; 5:30; 6:38). It is His scrutiny and discernment concerning the motives of the heart, His verdict, His “well done” (Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5) that governs Jesus’ every move. So this becomes the same priority for the authentic child of God (I Cor. 4:2-5). Man’s accolade is of no concern. How opposite this attitude is with regard to the natural man who would prefer to flee from the searching judgment of God (Ps. 139:23-24).

- (2) Jesus is sovereign over death, Abraham is subject to it, vs. 51-53.

It is best to understand Jesus as making a major concluding proclamation that gathers together the most important elements of His teaching thus far, though the subject of Abraham now rises to even greater significance, cf. vs. 33-40. Carson suggests that perhaps the thought of God as a judge in v. 50 has triggered Jesus' return to the main thrust of His ministry.⁵¹

- (a) Jesus' promise of His conquest of death, v. 51.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, He will in no way [ὄψ μῆ, ou mē] see/behold death.” Our immediate response would be, “But men and women, believers and unbelievers in Jesus, continue to die. However this emphatic statement, “of peculiar gravity and solemnity,”⁵² surely reveals Jesus' understanding of death as being far more than mere physical dissolution (5:24; 6:40, 47; 11:25-26). The Bible describes a more fearful “second death” that leads to consignment to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:6, 14-15). So here Jesus has a more vital concern for the condition of the soul, as distinct from the transient nature of the body. Consider four instances in the teaching of Jesus.

- 1) Jesus describes *the death of the soul*, as distinct from the living body, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead” (Matt. 8:22). Many today, of all levels of society are the living dead, alive, energetic, hard working, yet captive to self, materialism, being spiritual corpses.
- 2) Jesus describes *the priority of the soul*, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to kill both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The body is a house; what matters is he who inhabits, not mere window-dressing.
- 3) Jesus describes *the value of the soul*, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). John Bunyan wrote on this verse in *The Greatness of the Soul*, stating: “There is not anything, nor all the things under heaven, were they all in one man's hand, and all at his disposal, that would go in exchange for the soul, or that would certainly recover it from the confines of hell.”⁵³
- 4) Jesus describes *the folly of the soul*, “I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool!

⁵¹ Carson, *John*, p. 355.

⁵² Ryle, *John*, II, p. 143.

⁵³ John Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 107.

This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared” (Luke 12:19). There is a day of separation coming, between the soul that is enduring and our goods that will dissolve. But then our soul must give account. Hence, what great foolishness it now is to invest mainly in fleeting goods, the body

Without doubt there is much folly of the soul, much soul-death surrounding Jesus’ presence here in John 8, and surely that is His great concern, not the mere expiration of the body. The slander has surely indicated the decadence that is so prevalent. Yet in the face of such a spiritual graveyard, Jesus does not retreat from a seeming hopeless situation. The dead are offered life through the obedience of faith that lays hold of “My word,” cf. vs. 31, 37, 43, the gospel of Jesus’ person and work.

(b) Jesus’ challenge with the death of Abraham, v. 52-53.

Judaism is intoxicated with Abraham since he is the unquestioned father of the faithful. For this reason some fanciful tales have been told about him. The rabbis frequently spoke of “the merits of the Fathers,” and this being so, Abraham had the greatest endowment of merit, so much so that he was said to sit at the gate of Gehenna, the future place of burning and torment, to deliver any Israelite. Edersheim further explains that,

the ships at sea were preserved through the merit of Abraham; the rain descended on account of it. For his sake alone had Moses been allowed to ascend into heaven, and to receive the Law; for his sake the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven; . . . Daniel had been heard for the sake of Abraham.⁵⁴

Already in vs. 33-39 Abraham has been the center of disputation between Jesus and the Jews. Now in vs. 52-59 Abraham returns as the focus of the ongoing dispute, except that the intensity of the conflict is ratcheted up many notches higher. Whereas Jesus has challenged the Jew’s morality in comparison with Abraham, now He has made a claim for Himself which, if true, unquestionably elevates Him far above Abraham. This being so, the greatest prop of Judaism is being pushed away, and who likes their darling religious conviction being demolished?

1) The Jews’ charge of the dominion of death in Abraham, v. 52.

“Therefore the Jews said to Him, ‘Now we have known that You have a demon [that You are devilishly mad]. Abraham died and also the prophets, and you say, ‘If any one keeps My word he shall in no way experience/taste [γέυομαι, geuomai] of death for ever.’”

⁵⁴ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, p. 271.

It is clear that the Jews did not understand Jesus' more profound reference to death; they have bodily dissolution chiefly in mind, whereas He makes reference to the death of the soul beyond the grave. In spite of the great piety, the peerless virtue of Abraham and the prophets, they died (Heb. 11:8, 13). Hence, Jesus' claim to sovereignty over death raises him above Abraham, which allegedly qualifies him as insane, demented, though not in an excusable sense. How significant it is that for all of the Jew's blindness, they rightly concluded only two possible extremes concern-ing Jesus, and not some humanistic middle ground. He was either divine or deranged! What say you?

2) The Jews' comparison of dead Abraham and living Jesus, v. 53.

"You are not greater than our father Abraham who died, [are you? No, certainly not!] The prophets also died. Whom do you make yourself out [to be]?" As we have seen, Abraham, though subject to death, was thought to have sufficient merit to deliver from Gehenna, yet this could not match Jesus' claim to resurrect the body, to impart life to the dead. Thus Jesus is not only greater than Jacob (4:12-14), Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:3-5; Heb. 3:1-6), Solomon (Matt. 12:42), and Jonah (Matt. 12:41), but also Abraham. Certainly the evidence of the life of Jesus would support this, but a perverse agenda trumps this!

Hence the concluding question here, "Whom do you make yourself out [to be]?" is rather insulting in view of previous declarations (1:51; 4:14, 25-26; 5:17, 21, 24, 26-29; 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 7:37-38; 8:12). Jesus is solidly, comfortably aware of Who He is. There is no need for Him to be under man's scrutiny. It is an impertinent question because it suggests that Jesus is on a crusade of His own making. He is supposedly promoting Himself according to His own design and public relations campaign. In other words, "Jesus, tell us what this personal spin is that you are advancing?"

Of course, in reality, these inquisitors are under Jesus' scrutiny, and He has not been hesitant in declaring His findings. These Jews are uncovered as "murderers," 7:19, 25, "adulterers," 8:7-9, "carnal souled," 8:15, "guilty sinners," 8:21, 24, "devilish," 8:44, "liars," 8:55, and they resent this exposure. Hence this leads us to the conclusion that Jesus' confrontation with the Jews here is more about who man is rather than man's investigation of Jesus. For man, there is far greater significance in the fact of his being under the scrutiny of Jesus than Jesus being under the scrutiny of man. Certainly Jesus asked of his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:13-15). Further, you may agree with Peter when he responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). However, Jesus has come to save Peter, who confesses who he is. "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke

5:8). Peter agrees with Jesus assessment of himself, but the Jews here do not. That is what matters here.

Many a book has been written, following intense and detailed analysis, concerning the discovery of the historical Jesus, the real Jesus. But few have been written on Jesus' discovery of the real me. If such a manuscript were written, in all decency, it could not be published! The Jews here, with clinical detachment ask, "Whom do you make yourself out [to be]?" It would have been better for them to ask, "Jesus, thou Son of God, who do you say that *we* are?" This they will not ask because it gets to the heart of the problem. Nevertheless, Jesus volunteers a full answer, and in all honesty it is not particularly flattering. In fact it is hideous, revolting, shameful! The difference is that the Jews would not admit it before Jesus, and Peter did admit it to Jesus. Herein is the basic difference between the person who is serious concerning Jesus Christ and the person who merely patronizes and investigates Him! One person finds mercy, the other person finds judgment; one person Jesus receives, the other person Jesus condemns.

- (3) Jesus is sovereign in history, Abraham is subject to it, vs. 54-56.

The knowledge of God is most fundamental to any human being, especially His primary characteristics of holiness, oneness, and sovereignty. Nevertheless, even Satan believes this essential truth. "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder" (Jas. 2:19). Hence what is further necessary is righteous and vital union with this same God. The demons know nothing of this. Herein is the distinguishing mark of a true child of God, even as the Son of God is also distinguished. So Jesus Christ now testifies of Himself having this union with God the Father that the Jewish leaders do not.

- (a) He is the glorified Son of God, v. 54.

"Jesus answered, 'If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, [of] whom you say, 'He is our God.'"' The Jews' previous question, "Whom do *you* make *yourself* out [to be]?" was framed suggesting a manner of self-interest, which is the framework in which the Jews operate. For Jesus, the thought of Him acting independently for self-enhancement is abhorrent; the suggestion that *He* *aspires* to present himself as being greater than Abraham is also offensive since it ignores the will of His Father; self-absorption is the rebellious inclination of man, even though he may appear religious and express orthodox "Father talk," v. 41. The Jews readily confess, "He [the Father] is our God," without having any union with that same Father or ruling desire for His approval. Further, none speak of God as "my Father" as Jesus does. The Son of God is consumed by intense "Father-interest," and especially His approval of Jesus' ministry. But furthermore there is also paradox here in the fact that He who so carefully disclaims any designs for personal honor for Himself shall

nevertheless receive the most exalted honor from the Father. Just how often do we really act with such a constraint as Jesus?

- (b) He is the keeper of the Word of God, v. 55.

“And you have not known Him, but I know Him; and if I said that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I know Him and keep His Word.” At this point, Jesus does not pull His punches! He repeats His earlier charge that both the Jews in general, 7:28, and the Pharisees, 8:19, do not know God in terms of a vital union! This is a bold charge that is brought against the leaders of monotheistic Judaism. Whatever the recitations of the *shema* (Deut. 6:4) may be, in reality they are phony confessions. But further, by way of pressing the point home, Jesus argues that so absolutely certain is He of His knowledge of His Father that should He deny it, then He would be a liar like these religious charlatans and pretenders. In other words, Jesus is affirming to His audience: “As certain as I AM the Son of God, these pillars of the Jewish church are frauds; you can count on it.” For further proof, consider that I “keep/perform/ accomplish” the Father’s Word; these scoundrels merely recite it.” There is no latitude here; profession of faith must result in consistent performance, otherwise it is phony.

- (c) He was the delight of Abraham, v. 56.

“Your Father Abraham rejoiced/was overjoyed [ἀγαλλιάομαι, *agalliaōmai*] in order that he might see My day, and he saw [aorist] it and he was elated/glad [χαίρω, *chairō*].” To further prove that Jesus had not personally sought to promote Himself, He resorts to the astounding claim that, on the other hand, father Abraham had rendered to Him great approbation.

- 1) *What did Abraham see in Jesus that so aroused him?* It was revelation concerning “My day,” “the day of Jesus Christ,” and not merely “My hour,” 8:20; 12:23; 17:1. What was this “day”? In broad terms, it would include the whole ministry of Jesus Christ incorporated in His first and second comings which is so central to the covenant promise originally made to Abraham. By means of this “day” would be brought about the consummation. “the period of the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:20-21; cf. Phil. 1:10; 2:16).⁵⁵
- 2) *When did Abraham see Jesus?* The fact that “he saw it” indicates the past, which must be either at his conversion in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2) and Haran in Mesopotamia, or his subsequent residence in Canaan. We know that God personally *spoke and appeared* to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; especially 17:1-8;

⁵⁵ This is the opinion of Ryle, as well as Alford who also points out that the expression here was used Rabbinically for the time of Messiah’s appearance, *Greek Testament*, I, p. 724. Also see Carson, *John*, pp. 356-357 for further Rabbinical evidence.

18:1-33; Acts 7:2), and this we take to be by means of a Christophany. Thus Jesus probably told Abraham much concerning His primary role in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham's seed, even as mirrored in the offering of Isaac.

- 3) *Why was Abraham elated about Jesus' revelation of "My day"?* We might ask from the Old Testament, what was it that Abraham was promised and anticipated when he took up residence in Canaan? It was, "the land which I will show you," "a great nation, greatly blessed," and "resultant blessing on the nations of the earth" (Gen. 12:1-3). In Genesis 17:17 Abraham did "laugh" before God, though more apparently in unbelief. Rather Abraham, in personal encounter with Jesus,⁵⁶ like Jacob (Gen. 32:24-32), learned of His Savior's full ministry. As a believer, the scope of this astonished him, so much so that he was enraptured with the prospects set before him. Perhaps he sang! This is why, when dwelling in the land, yet "he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . . [He, along with Isaac and Jacob] desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one, . . . the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22).⁵⁷ Of Abraham it may be said that he "exulted in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). So it is the case with every child of God who has the eyes of his faith fixed on the *full scope* of salvation in Jesus Christ (I John 3:2). It is not only the "hour" of Jesus Christ, but supremely "His all encompassing day."

- (4) Jesus is sovereign over time, Abraham is subject to it, vs. 57-59.

The Jews have not failed to grasp the full import of Jesus' unblushing claim in v. 56, of preexistence contemporary with Abraham. This in itself was a breathtaking assertion from Jesus' own lips that He was the Messiah.⁵⁸ Now He makes the ultimate clarification, namely that His preexistence is that associated with deity, Hashem, even Jehovah. Hence, the question arises as to how man, especially when religious, will react to such a revelation; will it be with *reviling* or *reverence*, *loathing* or *love*, *despite* or *devotion*? Why is it the former, not the latter responses? But more importantly, what is it that

⁵⁶ So Alford, Brown, Hengstenberg.

⁵⁷ This was not hope in a heaven above scenario in contrast with the inferior earth below. Rather it was the common Hebrew expectation of heaven coming to earth (Matt. 6:9-10; Rev. 21:1-14). As C. K. Barrett explains: "The Rabbinic literature in general looks forward to a restored Jerusalem under earthly conditions. The new city is described in detail in terms which are often fantastic, but the welter of imagination bestowed upon the subject does not alter the fact that what the Rabbis hoped for, and described as *ירושלם של עולם הבא*, 'the Jerusalem of the age to come', was essentially the material capital of a material state. The heavenly tabernacle in Hebrews is not the product of Platonic idealism, but the eschatological temple of apocalyptic Judaism, the temple which is in heaven primarily in order that it may be manifested on earth." C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of Hebrews," *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, eds., W. D. Davies and D. Daube, pp. 374, 389. Alford confirms this truth when commenting on Galatians 4:26, *Greek New Testament*, III, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, p. 193.

changes this order from the reviling, loathing, and despising of Jesus to reverence, love, and devotion concerning Him?

- (a) His eternity is challenged, v. 57.

“Therefore the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old and have You seen Abraham?’” The heart of the argument of v. 56 is brushed aside, except for it being a matter of contention at a strictly carnal level. In other words, Jesus was not old enough to qualify for retirement, such as when a Levite completed his temple service aged fifty (Num. 4:3). Similarly Westcott explains that: “This age was the crisis of completed manhood.”⁵⁹ Unlike Abraham, who died at one hundred and seventy-five years, Jesus had not yet reached a venerable old age. Of course the problem here, as with many today who merely patronize Jesus, is that they will only entertain His humanity. Whatever the evidence of deity there is, it cannot be tolerated, the reason surely being that deity calls for submission and worship and accountability.

- (b) His eternity is upheld, v. 58.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born [aorist tense], I MYSELF AM [ἐγὼ εἰμί, egō eimi, present tense].” Here is perhaps the most unqualified confession by Jesus that He is essentially, eternally Jehovah. The revealed personal name of God, יהוה, (Exod. 3:13-15), the Tetragrammaton, Hashem, the ineffable name that was not to be voiced by a devout Hebrew to avoid breaking the third commandment, is plainly spoken and claimed by Jesus. By this response He qualifies for the charge of blasphemy by the Jews if His claim is false. Abram (the earthly name, meaning “exalted father”) had become Abraham (the name of promise, “father of a multitude”) when the covenant was signified by circumcision (Gen. 17:1-14). Jesus, akin to Joshua meaning “salvation,” is the earthly name that is here transcended by the self-proclaimed heavenly name “LORD,” meaning Jehovah (Phil. 2:9-11). Here then is the climactic declaration of this discourse. Jesus, having continuous existence, even at the “beginning” (1:1) is transcendentally greater than Abraham who was begotten in time. Jesus the eternal trumps the temporal Abraham. When Abraham was nothing, “all things came into being through [Jesus],” (1:3). When Abraham was nothing, Jesus was gloriously existing “in the bosom of the Father” (1:18).

- (c) His eternity is threatened, v. 59.

“Therefore they [the Jews] took up stones so that they might throw [them] at Him. But Jesus was hidden/concealed [hid/concealed

⁵⁹ Westcott, *John*, p. 140.

Himself?]⁶⁰ and went out of the temple.” There is no place for ambivalence here, though sadly there are also no genuine “hallelujah’s,” no outbursts of reverent, adoring grateful praise. There is only furious rage, seething indignation that cannot constrain itself even in terms of the necessity of a proper trial, and the consent of Rome for the death penalty (18:31). So the law is unjustly applied (Lev. 24:16) by those worthy of stoning themselves, vs. 3-9. But really, Jesus is not on trial, whatever man may think. His ability to escape unscathed, to be in control of circumstances, here and at other times, 7:30, 44; 8:20; 18:6; 19:11, indicates sovereign dominion over the opposition of man. In the face of this most categorical confession, supported by mighty deeds of mercy and kindness, and even the acknowledgment of 7:46, none of which can be thwarted by man, it is therefore man who is on trial, and the passing centuries and the end of this age will prove it (Acts 17:30-31). But is there no solution to such seeming rigid, intractable unbelief? The schemes of man may be frustrated by Jesus, but the real problem is the hardness, deafness, and blindness of his heart.

We earlier raised the question as to what it is that can change the heart from an attitude of persecution toward Jesus to that of praise. How can a person who is blind to the glory of Jesus yet gain sight of who He really is? The only answer can be that it is Jesus Himself who brings about such conversion, that is enlightenment to a darkened soul, and it is John 9 that provides such a vivid indication of this truth. Unlike the Jewish leaders, here is a man who knows of his blindness, yet he is unable to cure himself. Only Jesus Christ can give sight to the blind, and He said so Himself. “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind.” (Luke 4:18).

B. *SIGN SIX – CHRIST HEALS THE MAN BORN BLIND, 9:1-41.*

1. Introduction.

- a. Is it wrong for a Christian to vigorously argue for truth against error? Some would say “No,” for several reasons. First, pride too often creeps in so that we end up vindicating self rather than the truth. However this is only an argument against wrongly motivated argument. Second, it is said that more often tempers flare and feelings become strong, though sometimes this is the case with Christ when He repeatedly accused the Jews of being hypocrites, fools, vipers (Matt. 23:13-33). Error should effect our temperament, especially in times of moral indifference, though in conjunction with sanctified self-control. Third, little is accomplished since a wedge is usually driven in between people. Though this is not always the case, and even if it were Scripture does not necessarily condemn such a result. Consider Paul at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-5; I Thess. 2:1-16), Athens

⁶⁰ The aorist passive is strictly interpreted here, which Morris suggests could be a reference to the Father’s protection. *John*, p. 474.

(Act 17:32-34), Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10). Here the Apostle persuaded, reasoned, argued, disputed, sometimes with good results but at other times he created a storm of antagonism resulting in endangerment to his life.

- b. The healing of the man born blind leads to a fierce argument, and what is the result? First, pride is evident, though preeminently on the part of the Jews, v. 28. Second, temper and anger flare on both sides, vs. 27, 34a. Third, a wedge is driven between the two parties, v. 34b. Nevertheless Christ does not reprimand the healed man for arguing; rather He comforts him because he has disputed for the vindication of the truth, that is the work of Christ, and not himself.
- c. The context with John 8 and 10. At the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus declares himself to be “the Light of the world” (8:12). This healing incident is approximately two months later, though it is selected by John as positive proof that Jesus does bring light that is spiritual rather than physical (9:5, 39). Jesus’ parable of the good shepherd teaches that he “calls his own sheep by name” out of the broad carnal fold of Israel (10:3). The man born blind depicts one such sheep that is called and responds to the shepherd’s voice.

2. The man born blind receives his physical sight, vs. 1-7.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this healing, at least on through v. 34, is solely physical, according to Christ’s sovereign dominion. Then follows spiritual healing and enlightenment of this man’s soul, vs. 35-41, that is also according to Christ’s good pleasure.

- a. The human object of theological discussion, vs. 1-5.

Theology is a wonderful study when it leads to emancipating truth concerning man’s sorry condition, when it tends toward the greater love of God, the promotion of righteousness in the soul and society; but it is a soul petrifying pursuit when it becomes merely a matter of cerebral, academic speculation at the expense of practical outworking amongst professing children of God. Such is the tragedy of the disciples of Jesus Christ at this juncture; their attitude is detached from genuine human concern, even as was the case of disinterest in the Samaritans at Sychar (4:38). But they will learn!

- (1) The human understanding of illness, v. 1-2.

It is a sad commentary on twisted human nature that it concludes human misfortune in others to be divine retribution on account of human misbehavior. Man commonly thinks this way of others when he is well! Though he will sometimes consider himself worthy of punishment by pain that he presently suffers. Sadly, the disciples consider this present situation as a fascinating theological problem, quite apart from any apparent sympathy. Here is a lesson in that detached, aloof, impersonal perception of man which contrasts with that compassionate interest of the Son of God.

- (a) He is a man born blind, v. 1.

“And passing by, He saw a man blind [τυφλός, *tuphlos*] from birth/begettal.” Presumably Jesus passes a familiar sight on a Jerusalem street, a beggar blind from his youth. But this time the disciples notice Jesus fix his eyes on this derelict as never before, though the unfortunate man is probably unaware of this divine interest. Here is the initiative of the sovereignty of Jesus, the individuality of the mercy of Jesus, cf. v. 35, the mystery of the timing of Jesus at this juncture and not before, one man probably among so many. But why? Particular grace!

- (b) He is a man condemned by man, v. 2.

“And His disciples asked Him saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for the reason that he became born blind?’” All the poor man *hears* is his tragic predicament described in terms of being a theological problem and specimen which, either way considered, makes him a disgrace, the sorry consequences of sin. Hence the disciples’ assessment is quite depressing to him. Either he is a congenital sinner thanks to his parents, or he is a practicing sinner by choice. Interestingly enough, man is both! From where did the disciples get such ideas? Perhaps from the Second Commandment (Exod. 20:5), or the example of Job’s comforters (4:7-9; 8:6, 20; 15:20-29; 18:5-21). The idea had become common in Judaism, but also in the Gentile world as Paul found out (Acts 28:4). Even the Son of God may allude to this principle in His healing of a paralytic (5:14). Indeed sin may directly produce sickness, but all sickness is certainly not attributable to personal sin.

- (2) The divine understanding of illness, vs. 3-5.

- (a) It displays the works of God the Father, v. 3.

“Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that *this man* [emphasis added] sinned nor his parents, but in order that the works of God might be manifest in him.’” Jesus defines this particular instance; it is not a generalization. In the divine plan of things, this poor man, at this time, has been selected in grace to give marvelous testimony to the “works of God,” the glory of God (Matt. 9:1-8; 15:29-31). Yes, this blind man is a sinner, and so were his parents. But his blindness is not connected; this symptom of the fallen human race, like that of Lazarus, will be instrumental in displaying the glory of God through the glorious working of His Son (11:3-4). Thus personal frailty, sickness, even tragedy, yet can glorify God’s grace!

- (b) It displays the works of God the Son, v. 4.

“It is necessary that we work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is daytime; nighttime is coming when no one is able to work.” The seasons of a year produce varying periods of limitation and opportunity, cloudiness and sunshine, darkness and light, the

interruption of storms, rain, hurricanes, freezing temperatures and then the occasions of invigorating warmth along with balmy breezes. So it is with human history as Jesus understands it. And so the relative calm in the world since 1945 should not be thought to be a guarantee of the future. On the contrary, there are darkening clouds on the horizon. Hence, the wise person takes advantage of the present. Even Jesus has a dark period ahead, so He must work in displaying His and the Father's glory while it is opportune.

- (c) It displays the light of God the Son, v. 5.

“While I am in the world, light I am in the world.” Jesus is about to demonstrate this very graphically. So He invites his immediate disciples to take advantage of His short earthly ministry, even now, because a time is soon coming when He will have ascended to His Father (12:35). Then those without a saving knowledge of Him will be plunged into the darkness of this world. His coming has been a break in the clouds, so to speak. But those clouds will soon roll in again! So, grasp the opportunity while it is with you. Make the best of the advantages of home; the chance of studying at school and college. Why? Because these advantages pass. So take the opportunity of learning about and believing in and identifying with Jesus Christ while the light of the truth is before you. Tomorrow you may be in hospital; tomorrow you may not be here! Again, “Night is coming when no one can work.” Take advantage of the light, the truth now, today! As Horatius Bonar has written:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
I am this dark world's light,
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise
And all thy days be bright.
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till travelling days are done.

- b. The human object of divine compassion, vs. 6-7.

- (1) The surgical *preparation* of Jesus the ophthalmologist, v. 6.

“Having said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay [πηλός, pē los] out of the spittle [πτύσμα, ptusma], and applied the clay to his eyes.” A similar method is used by Jesus on the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:33) and the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:23). Edersheim regards this method as “peculiar to the healing of Gentiles,”⁶¹ as when we lick a minor wound, hence doubly offensive to the Jews because this healing also occurred on the Sabbath, involving unlawful kneading and anointing, v. 14. Healing was

⁶¹ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus*, II, p. 45.

only allowed on the Sabbath if life was in jeopardy. But why the external means here, and not just a word of command? It was to communicate unmistakably to the man in terms of necessary obedience as with Naaman the Syrian (II Kgs. 5:8-14; cf. John 2:5), and to the audience that Jesus alone, and none other, performed this surgery.

(2) The surgical *prescription* of Jesus the ophthalmologist, v. 7.

“And He said to him, ‘Go, wash/bathe [νίπτω, niptō] in the pool [κολυμβήθρα, kolumbēthra] of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). Therefore he went away and he bathed and he came [back] seeing.” All this man is aware of is the touch of Jesus’ hand and the hearing of his voice, which concludes with an authoritative command. Probably the man is not immediately aware that Jesus then departs from the crowd. His eyes feel heavy; so he asks for the help of friends to guide him to the Pool of Siloam, meaning “Sent,” and reflective of Jesus’ order. Out of curiosity a large crowd follows. Then, as the man rather skeptically rinses his face (has he not tried many quack remedies over the years?), he erupts with passionate, wide-eyed exclamation: “I can see for the first time in my life!” This may only be physical sight at this point, but it does well illustrate the radically new perception that comes upon a person when they receive spiritual sight.

3. The man with new physical sight disputes with his neighbors, vs. 8-12.

But how, when light shines, darkness attempts to crowd in and dispel the light (1:5). Often this is attempted by means of closed-minded denial of reality, perverse rationalism that strives to deny the obvious.

b. The confusion, vs. 8-9.

However, in the mystery of human comprehension, some being not so far from the truth and others being distant from it, we find some inclined to believe that an astonishing supernatural event has taken place while others are adamant that a mere natural explanation is involved. The teaching of Jesus always divides men, without our being divisive.

(1) The tendency to belief, v. 8-9a.

“Therefore the neighbors and those previously observing [θεορέω, theoreō] him as a beggar, were saying, ‘Is this not the one who was sitting and begging, is it?’ [as difficult to believe as it may appear, yes!] Others were saying that, ‘This is [he].’” The question here expects a positive response, even if it struggles to comprehend the consequences. However, don’t jump to confess that had you been there, in a world of such primitive medicine, your reply would have been full and instant belief. We are naturally skeptical, doubtful, suspicious. And there is nothing wrong with cautiously weighing the circum-stances lest we succumb to a clever but fake religious operator.

- (2) The tendency to unbelief, v. 9b.

“[Yet] others were saying, ‘No [this is not he], but he is like him.’ That one was saying that, ‘I am [he].’” The evidence to believe is one thing, but the will to believe is quite another. And if one does not want to believe, especially on account of inevitable circumstances, then there is no telling what tortuous explanation might be concocted! If one presupposes the impossibility of Jesus performing such a miracle, then an explanation must be found. Here the only alternative is the fabrication of a wild scheme, even a deceitful plot. Jesus found a man who looked like the man born blind, except that he had normal sight. So he was recruited to make it look as though Jesus had performed a miracle. But it was a conspiracy! However the man repeatedly denies such a fanciful scenario, perhaps by pointing out further identifying features.

- c. The first confession, vs. 10-12.

The initial interrogators are the healed man’s neighbors, those who have known his pitiful condition for years, but also curious Jerusalemites. By now they probably know Jesus by reputation, and although he is not now present they probably suspect His influence.

- (1) The enquiry about the *modus operandi* , v. 10.

“Therefore they were saying to him. ‘How were your eyes opened?’” The immediate interest is the mechanics of the miracle since as the man is addressed, he looks at his questioners and communicates with his eyes. In other words, unlike his former vacant stare, he “looked them in the eye,” and they became drawn to his gaze. There is an engagement, an attraction as they look at each other. This cannot be faked. Hence the authentic, divinely wrought experience of darkness being turned to light not only draws attention, but also invites an explanation that will not deflate.

- (2) The basic explanation, v. 11.

“That one answered, ‘The man who is called Jesus made clay and he anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go into [the pool of] Siloam and bathe;’ therefore I went away and, having washed, I received my sight.’” This is the first of three confessions by this healed man, cf. vs. 17, 35-38. To begin with he simply nominates his healer as “the man who is called Jesus,” obviously someone known by reputation. Yet no other works of healing are mentioned. Now this explanation is true as far as it goes, yet it is as inadequate as a mere supposed painting of Jesus. Only His humanity is represented. However this healed man is sharp in his thinking and the ensuing dispute will prove to be a time of discovery. There will be progression in his understanding; light will increase until it fully bursts upon his soul. But for others there will only be damning regression!

(3) The mystery of Jesus disappearance, v. 12.

“And they said to him, ‘Where is that one [Jesus, who you say healed you]?’ He said [with a lowered tone], ‘I do not know.’” Perhaps there is the intimation, “Why should He depart if He has performed such a miracle? We would like to question Him.” However the real answer to this question is surely beyond the understanding of the crowd. First Jesus takes the initiative in paying attention to the blind man, v. 1. Then Jesus withdraws from the man without notice. Then Jesus finds the man and personally addresses Him, v. 35. Without such a divine order of events, all is lost for this man (Luke 19:10). Here is the mystery of divine romance that woos, withdraws, and woos even more passionately. This only enhances the love of he who is wooed in this manner, v. 38. The two Emmaus disciples encountered the same divine manner of courtship (Luke 24:15, 28-29, 31, 36, 52-53).

4. The man with new physical sight disputes with the Pharisees, vs. 13-34.

Religion is controversial; religion frequently results in heated argumentation, anxious conflict, strong disagreement, and painful division. However a vital distinction ought to be made in that it is inevitable outside the assembly of God’s people, but to be shunned at all cost within the fellowship of believers. It is the former scenario that now emerges, by means of three contested rounds, in which religion cannot endure the true person of Jesus Christ and his saving work. Each round has a distinctive strategy. The latter scenario of unity will eventually result between Jesus Christ and His new found lamb.

a. Round one concerning *legal* testimony, vs. 13-17.

It ought not to surprise us that the first line of attack here is of Jesus being charged with breaking the Sabbath. It has happened before (5:9, 18; cf. 7:22-23; Luke 6:1-11), and it will happen again (Luke 13:10-17).

(1) The pursuit of the prosecution, vs. 13-14.

Most likely some neighbors felt it incumbent upon them to bare testimony to the Pharisees because at least they, as distinct from a newly gathering crowd, could not deny that an astonishing miracle had taken place. They had witnessed the *before* and *after* and *in between!* They knew of former conflict that the Pharisees had fomented in their repudiation of Jesus.

(a) The summons of the healed man, v. 13.

“They [the neighbors] led him to the Pharisees, the man formerly blind.” It is not necessary to conclude malicious intentions here if we accept that it was also some neighbors or friends who, having listened to Jesus’ instructions, had assisted the healed man in his walking to the pool of Siloam. Thus they who guided his faltering steps also witnessed a radical change and independence. Remember that Jesus has already become the talk of Jerusalem. However, it is possible that the Pharisees, having jostled with Jesus before over Sabbath keeping, had made it

known that they wanted to learn of further infractions. Then again the neighbors may well have been thirsting for a further contest, having enjoyed earlier humiliation of the Jewish leaders (cf. Luke 13:17).

(b) The setting of the healing, v. 14.

“And it was the Sabbath in which day Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.” Here John reveals once again the perverted sense of priorities that absorbed Judaism at this time. Here man is made for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Here once more a conflict over theology is considered of greater importance than the emancipation of a man from darkness. The very structure of the sentence here conveys this. The man remains a mere object of speculation; there is no interest in the newfound delights of this man’s experience, no rejoicing along with the man. Hence Jesus is not afraid to confront this heartless religion head on, but especially since He boldly proclaims that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5).

(2) The investigation of the prosecution, vs. 15-17.

We may presume that the Pharisees, like the neighbors, v. 8, could testify to having seen this man before as a regular beggar of alms. There is no suggestion that here we have an imposter. Rather the scrutiny concerns not so much the man and his remarkable healing as the ongoing conflict that exists with Jesus and His recently made messianic claims (8:58-59). Thus a real, proven Sabbath-breaker could easily be disposed of as a messianic imposter, even by the people.

(a) The *modus operandi* of the healing, v. 15.

“Therefore again the Pharisees also were asking him, how he received his sight. And he said to them, ‘He placed clay on my eyes, and I washed and I see.’” That Jesus is said to have performed this miracle is a given. Again the interest is initially in the *modus operandi*, cf. v. 10, not the *persona operandi*. Ryle appropriately quotes Albert Barnes as follows:

The proper question to have been asked, was whether he had in fact been cured, and not in what way. The question about a sinner’s conversion is, whether in fact it has been done, and not about the mode or manner in which it has been effected. Yet no small part of disputes among men are about the *mode* in which the Spirit renews the heart, and not about the *fact* that it has been done.⁶²

So a second time the man testifies to the truth in explicit terms, which examination seems only to embolden him and expand his comprehension all the more.

⁶² Ryle, *John*, II, p. 172.

(b) The illegality of the healing, v. 16.

“Therefore certain of the Pharisees were saying, ‘This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others were saying, ‘How is a man being a sinner able to perform such signs?’ And there was a division [σχίσμα, schisma] among them.” The rift among the Pharisees here may well involve the input of Nicodemus, Gamaliel, even Joseph of Arimathea. The *naysayers* are rationalists and legalists who stake their all on their perverted understanding of sabbatarianism. Consequently Jesus is not from God, certainly not the Son of God, and thus He is worthy of death (Exod. 31:14; Deut. 13:1-4). The *yeasayers* are likewise rationalists (3:2), but also experientialists, evidentialists, and really agnostics, based upon truth that the naysayers prefer to ignore; the yeasayers make a telling if not conclusive point that the quality of fruit is determined by the nature of the root (Luke 6:44), which receives no recorded reply. Of course the implication here is that the legalistic naysayers need to reexamine their understanding of the Sabbath. On the other hand, the yeasayer’s argument is not absolute. What if a charlatan did deceptively convince that such a miracle was allegedly performed (Matt. 7:22-23)? Hence, for the second time John attests to Jesus being productive of division (cf. 7:43; 10:19), especially in the environment of formal, establishment religion.

(c) The identification of the Healer, v. 17.

“Therefore they were again saying to the blind man, ‘What do you say concerning Him, because He opened your eyes?’ And he said that, ‘He is a prophet.’” Here the man realizes that he cannot possibly please all of the Pharisees. Hence, facing a tough question before many Jesus haters, the healed man sides more with the yeasayers. After a second testimony the healed man gives a second conclusion. It is an improvement in that Jesus is not only a “man,” v. 11, but also a “prophet;” yet this response is quite insufficient (cf. 6:14; Deut. 18:15). Notice that the question is *not* whether Jesus performed the miracle; that is a given here. Rather the concern *is* the identity that is to be ascribed to Jesus on account of his being the author of such a unique wonder.

Herein lies a vital distinction between understanding and faith. Understanding declares that Jesus performed this healing, but then even Satan would believe this; understanding acknowledges the fact! However faith concludes that this fact points to something. As it were, faith is launched as the man here acknowledges that Jesus is not only a man but also a prophet. Thus faith only comes to full, saving bloom when Jesus is acknowledged as Lord and worship results, v. 36. Another man, who responded intelligently to Jesus was told, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34, but cf. Acts 26:28-29).

b. Round two concerning *parental* testimony, vs. 18-23.

How do nominally religious parents react when their children become deeply transformed by the power of Jesus Christ? In *Life Magazine* years ago, some parents commented concerning their daughter who, upon conversion to biblical Christianity, had been delivered from drug addiction. Astonishingly they said that they would prefer that she revert to her unconverted state. It seemed that her more godly lifestyle made them feel uncomfortable. However this is not simply a sign of modern decadence, as we will now appreciate.

(1) The incredulity of the Jews, v. 18-21.

When the ways of God conflict with the reasonings of man, (Isa. 55:8-9), often the ways of God come under much closer scrutiny than the faulty reasonings of man, as is the case with the Jews here. It is only faith in God, as He has revealed Himself, that resolves the seeming tension.

(a) The recourse of Jewish unbelief, vs. 18-19.

The “Jews” here is probably a more inclusive reference to the Pharisees and other sectarian leaders. They too would love to be convinced that this healed man was not in fact the man born blind. Then the miracle would have reduced status, and perhaps a more naturalistic explanation would be possible.

1) They seek the identification of the healed man, v. 18.

“Therefore the Jews did not believe concerning him that he was blind and received his sight until they called the parents of he who had received his sight.” Of course the evidence was not really lacking; many had frequently seen the man over the years. As Ryle writes, here is:

the folly of supposing that mere evidence alone will ever make men Christians. It is the want [lack] of will to believe, and not the want of reasons for believing, that makes men infidels.⁶³

It may well be that there was a hope amongst the Jews that, under threat of excommunication, the parents could be pressured into denying their son. Should this happen, any other testimony would be considered as worthless. Certainly the parents felt such pressure, vs. 22-23.

2) They seek the explanation of the man’s healing, v. 19.

“And they [the Jews questioned them [the parents] saying, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Therefore how does he now see?’” Thus the Jews, in desperately wanting a denial that the healed man is the parent’s son, seem to add forceful persuasion.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 174.

They make it clear that they would also want the supposed healer identified. And it was known that identification of Jesus in this instance would result in excommunication. The disqualification of the Nazarene was their supreme goal, v. 24. Hence, it would be better for the parents not to identify the healed man as their son. However the Jews may have overlooked an unexpected response from the disturbed couple.

(b) The response of pressured parents, vs. 20-21.

Parents often have personal conflicts in family life, with one another and their children, though time ought to be a good teacher of resolution. However, in leaving an impression upon their children in such times of testing, nothing will be more impressive than moral consistency and integrity, especially with regard to marriage vows. Children are well aware of human weaknesses; but it is commitment to vows, one another, loyalty, truthfulness, honesty, and welfare, that above all else convinces children that mum and dad are fundamentally honorable and thus to be revered. Treating a child nicely is of small worth if that little one discovers that mum and dad are moral phonies. And unfortunately, when put to the test here, the parents prove to be a failure. They refuse to gratefully acknowledge their son's Savior!

1) They correctly identify the healed man, v. 20.

"Therefore his parents answered and said, 'We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.'" This is true as far as it goes, but it does not nearly go far enough. At least the parents have not bowed to the pressure of shamefully denying their son. However there is not the slightest enthusiastic acknowledgment that a great blessing had come upon their family.

2) They cowardly deny the *modus operandi*, v. 21.

"But how he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age; he will speak concerning himself." This may have been regarded as a safe response, but it was not a totally honest one. Yes, the healed man was obviously above thirteen years of age. So there is some self-serving evasion here. We grant that the parents were probably poor, having a son who begged. However, not only did they seem to know that Jesus had performed the miracle, v. 22-23, and thus refuse to testify truthfully about this, but also for the sake of personal safety and thus escape from further scrutiny and ostracism, they preferred to place their son in greater jeopardy. It is costly to believe in Jesus, but for those who do not count the cost, there is the great compensation of being found by Jesus, v. 35.

(2) The insight of John the Apostle, vs. 22-23.

How does John know this inside information? Probably because he had privileged access to the high priest and Sanhedrin deliberations (18:15-16).

(a) He is privy to the Jew's excommunication decree, v. 22.

“His parents said these things because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed him to be Christ, he would become excommunicated/synagogue expelled [ἀποσυνάγωγος, aposunagōgos].” How true it proves to be here that “the fear of man brings a snare” (Prov. 29:25; cf. John 7:13; 12:42; 19:38). Here the tyranny of formal religion rears its ugly head and snares these threatened parents. Rather than emancipate, it imprisons men in a labyrinth of controlling, hierarchical decrees. And as here, it is the saving, healing, illuminating, liberating work of Christ that especially arouses such concerted opposition as now becomes evident.

(b) He is privy to the parent's fear of excommunication, v. 23.

“On account of this his parents said that, ‘He is of age; he himself will speak.’” John seems to have been surprised that such a lack of appreciation for Jesus should come from parents so blessed by Jesus. In other words, how could a parent do such a thing? He blows the whistle on their wimpish attitude. That is why he makes his editorial comment here. But man is a sinner in all of his relationships. “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I [the LORD] will not forget you” (Isa. 49:15). The man who received his sight from Jesus proved this to be so. “There is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24), closer than any earthly relative.

c. Round three concerning *personal* testimony, vs. 24-34.

When we enter into a prolonged dispute, it is common not only for attitudes to become increasingly heated, but also for our arguments to tend to become more irrational. So the mood here becomes more inflamed with the result that the reasoning becomes quite muddled. Yet with truth on the side of the man who received his sight, in spite of his frustration, he upholds clear, sanctified thinking. Light to his body has also led to the commencement of light to his soul.

(1) The false testimony of theological evasion, v. 24.

“Therefore they [the Jews] asked the man who was blind a second time, and said to him, ‘Give glory to God; we [emphatic] know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner.’” Pressure is brought to bear on the healed man to “tell the truth,” since the Jews appear to subject him to a type of oath (Josh. 7:19). In other words, the man is faced with the same threat of excommunication as his parents. Further, an attempt is made to lead the witness, even bully him with

their supposedly authoritative denunciation of Jesus as a proven sinner. However it is impossible to invoke reverently the name of God, even in an oath, and at the same time intentionally reject the testimony of His Son (5:23). Furthermore, it is sadly possible, with the employment of carnal zeal, to ascribe glory to God while in reality we are bringing dishonor and shame to His name (Rom. 2:23-24)!

(2) The true testimony of undeniable experience, vs. 25-29.

One of the hallmarks of evangelical Christianity is the vital place it gives to personal experience in conjunction with Bible truth. Formal, creedal religion may be correct while at the same time it is void of the life of God. However truth results in emancipation (8:32), and the emancipated person is not inclined to remain dumb. So the healed man here is constrained by the force of truth in his life to testify of its undeniable reality. He cannot be shut up. Of course experience on its own is not conclusive, especially in today's experience saturated society when we routinely enquire, "How are you feeling?" But let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater, especially when experience is verifiable!

(a) The persuasion of subjective testimony, v. 25.

"Therefore that one [the healed man] answered, 'If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know that, having been blind, now I see.'" To begin with, like his parents, the healed man ducks the critical question concerning the identification and moral character of his healer. With his back to the wall, he resorts to personal experience that is, for himself, absolutely undeniable. However this experience is verifiable according to Scripture (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1). Likewise today we are bound to accept the testimony of experience *only* when it is known to be validated according to the Word of God. It is not merely a balance between experience and Scripture that is required, but rather experience that results from and is described in Scripture truth (Rom. 5:1). This man can no more deny his new world of perception than he can deny his own existence. The same is true for the Christian and thus he similarly declares:

"I was dark and now I have light. I was afraid of God, and now I love Him. I was fond of sin, and now I hate it. I was blind and now I see." . . . The hungry man eats, and feels refreshed; the thirsty man drinks, and feels refreshed. Surely the man who has within him the grace of God, ought to be able to say, "I feel its power."⁶⁴

(b) The persistence of blind unbelief, v. 26.

"Therefore they [the Jews] said to him, 'What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?'" How stubborn is unbelief, groping in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 170.

darkness for any way of escape from confrontation with truth, provided that it is an exit which leads in fact to more darkness. Men “love darkness rather than light, for their deeds were evil” (3:19). How desperate is man when he continues to apply the scientific method to divine engineering. Even if this question of “how” were really answered, could man understand it? Furthermore faith would not result because the real problem here is not analytical comprehension but a lack of humble submission to God’s supernatural revelation, however it impacts me personally. This, the pride of the religious Jews will not allow!

- (c) The power of piercing rhetoric, v. 27.

“He answered them, ‘I spoke to you already and you did not hear. Why do you wish to hear it again? You do not also wish to become His disciple [do you, surely not]?’” Exasperation now blends with boldness that seems to reveal the abandonment of neutrality by the healed man. His unlearned rationality begins to rise above the irrationality of the learned. Now there is an oblique indication that the man has sided with Jesus as a disciple. Further, with audacious cynicism, almost mockery, he suggests a preposterous, intentionally offensive idea that stimulates an indignant response. He is not disappointed!

- (d) The presumption of arrogant religion, v. 28.

“And they reviled/abusively addressed [λοιδορέω, loidoreō, cf. I Cor. 4:12] him and said, ‘You [emphatic] are a disciple of that one [Jesus]; but we [emphatic] are disciples of Moses.’” What an indignity it is for the high and mighty to be humiliated by a mere commoner. However the real sting here is in the suggestion that the Jews might in fact be secret disciples of Jesus. Now the arrogance of proud, legalistic religion reaches new heights; it subjects Jesus to the judgment of Moses whereas the New Testament clearly teaches that Moses must bow in submission before Jesus (Matt. 17:1-5; John 1:17; Heb. 3:1-6).

- (e) The pomposity of proud religion, v. 29.

“We [emphatic] know that God has spoken to Moses; but we do not know from where this one [Jesus] is from.” Yes, and even the devils know that God has spoken to Moses. But how in fact was Moses vindicated before Israel as God’s spokesman? First by God revealing to him His own name (Exod. 3:11-18), yet Jesus takes to himself that very name as His own (John 8:58). Second by God giving to him the power to perform signs and wonders (Exod. 4:1-9, 17), yet Jesus did greater wonders than Moses because “all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). Moses never gave sight to a man born blind or raised the dead. Here is well illustrated Paul’s maxim: “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (I Cor. 8:1). The Jews are puffed up with a sense of their own importance and superior understanding, and this is blinding to the soul of the natural man. Yet

the healed man, stimulated by new sight, now out of a love for the Lord Jesus, however meager it presently is, determines to valiantly testify concerning his unseen Savior. And how, by way of stark contrast, this endorsement edifies, vs. 30-33.

(3) The true testimony of growing boldness, vs. 30-33.

Boldness here is in no way to be confused with arrogance; it is simply the assertion of compelling, transforming, truth, like that described by Jeremiah concerning the unstoppable pressure of the truth blazing in his soul: “The word of the Lord . . . becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it” (Jer. 20:8-9). It is similar to the “burden” of the prophet, the weight, the compulsion of the truth of God that must be proclaimed, quite irregardless of personal cost (Isa. 13:1; Ezek. 12:8-11; Hab. 1:2; Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1). In other words, “The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8).

(a) The faith that produces fortitude, v. 30.

“The man answered and said to them, ‘Well, in this is the marvel [of marvels], because you do not know from where He is, and [yet] He opened my eyes!’” There is a rise in assertiveness here of a member of the refuse of society, supposedly the pitiable object of divine judgment, and that before the religious aristocracy, the meanest of Job’s comforters. His clarity of thinking, stimulated by Jesus’ preliminary surgery, is not blinded by religious self-righteousness and perverse tradition. Hence, he thoughtfully addresses the issue at hand and does not descend to the *ad hominem* vitriol of his assailants. Of course the real marvel or amazement here has been the healing of the blind man; however in finding it happily impossible to deny his own glorious experience, yet the healed man finds it far more difficult to comprehend the unbelief of the leaders of Israel! Their learning appears to have made them blind; they have lost sight of the fundamental truth that a man’s root is indicated by his fruit. And what does this say about them?

(b) The faith that produces factuality, v. 31.

“We know that God does not hear sinners. But if anyone is a god fearer [a serious worshipper of God] and does His will, He hears this one.” A universal principle is propounded which no one in Israel would dispute, whether learned or unlearned. It is that the ungodly are shunned by God on account of their ungodly deeds (Job 35:12; 37:9; Ps. 18:41; 34:15; 66:18; Prov. 1:28; 15:29; 28:9; Isa. 1:15; Jer. 11:11; 14:12; Ezek. 8:18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:13; Tit. 1:15-16; Jude 14-15), whereas the godly receive the blessing of God on account of their working the works of God (Acts 10:1-4, 34-35). This principle is illustrated by the prophets of Baal who were not heard by God in contrast with His hearing of Elijah (I Kings 18:26-29, 36-39). Hence, to repudiate Jesus is contradictory in terms of the plain evidence of His “being heard” by God in no

uncertain terms (9:4; 10:37-38). As with His disciples, Jesus was authenticated by both His words and works.

- (c) The faith that proclaims precedent, v. 32.

“From the beginning of time it has not been heard that anyone has opened the eyes of a person born blind.” In the Old Testament there is no explicit healing of a person who had become blind, even after birth.⁶⁵ There is the case of Elisha’s servant who, in fearing the threat of surrounding Arameans, had his eyes opened so as to see that “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”(II Kgs. 6:11-17). But the healing of congenital blindness was universally unheard of, and this continues to be the case since this miracle. The reason for this is that blindness at birth quickly renders the brain incapable of sensitivity necessary to receive ocular images, even should the eye later be restored to full healthy image transmission.

- (d) The faith that promotes rationality, v. 33.

“If this man was not from God [as you assert], He would not be able to do nothing [anything].” This unlearned man yet comes to the same conclusion as that of the learned Nicodemus who confessed before Jesus, “no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (3:2). It is the development of the argument commenced at v. 30 that now reaches such a compelling conclusion, that is unless one has a hidden, albeit irrational agenda. Yet however forcefully the truth of God may seem to be presented, it often suffers at the hands of an ingrained theological system, namely traditional as distinct from biblical Judaism. In other words, institutional religion can be so terribly wrong, while fresh new light can dawn through unexpected means, though those who present it will often suffer as a result. Thus George Rawson has well written:

We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial, and confined.
No, let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His word.

So where has this powerful argument now led our bold witness, for all of his tenacity and courage? Has he convinced his disputants? Quite to the contrary. So has this contest really been worthwhile? Yes, a thousand times, yes!

⁶⁵ There is the instance in the *Apocrypha* of Tobit having his sight restored, Tobit 2:10; 11:10-14.

(4) The false testimony of irrational abuse, v. 34.

“They answered and said to Him, ‘In sins You were wholly born, and you are teaching us?’ And they cast him out.” In an argument when our case is torn to shreds, our recourse is either to make a humble confession of error or, more often, to retreat to the employment of an *ad hominem* assault upon our opponent, rather than the point in dispute. So the Jews resort to this desperate tactic culturally, verbally, and physically! The vindictiveness here knows no bounds, and high learning bears no correlation with the preferable employment of moderation, self-control, reasonableness. Indeed, biblical knowledge yields to irrationality, even absurdity. What of the Messianic promises of Isaiah 29:18; 35:4-5; 42:6-7, 18-19?

- (a) *Culturally*, the healed man is degraded, slandered as being born out of wedlock, a bastard, a social deviant. Thus from his beginning he was the object of divine displeasure.
- (b) *Verbally*, the healed man is censured on account of supposed insolence, disrespect of more learned seniors. He is dressed down having challenged conventional religion.
- (c) *Physically*, the healed man is excommunicated, though much more was involved than bodily expulsion. Edersheim explains what it was to be “out-synagogued.”

Henceforth he was like one dead. He was not allowed to study with others, no intercourse was to be held with him, he was not even to be shown the road. He might, indeed, buy the necessities of life, but it was forbidden to eat or drink with such a one.⁶⁶

Where then has the courage of this man landed him? What has he got for his trouble? Humanly speaking he has lost out. But from heaven’s perspective, the mind of Christ, the opposite is the case. We now come to the real turning-point in this man’s life.

5. The man with new physical sight receives his spiritual sight, vs. 35-38.

What a sorry consequence. The man who had beheld the wonders of the world around him for the first time, the faces of friends and his parents, has also beheld the ugliness of religious bigotry, and now the look of neighbors as if he were a leper. This has all come about because of a man, even a prophet named Jesus who he has not so much as seen.

a. Jesus seeks the lost, v. 35.

“Jesus heard that they cast him out, and finding him He said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’” Some time elapses. The healed man learns what it is like to be a complete social outcast. Jesus also learns of the man’s ostracism. Then the

⁶⁶ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, p. 184.

healed man, depressed of soul, encounters a man, unlike any other, who intentionally, forthrightly approaches him without the slightest hesitancy or disapproval. It is Jesus fulfilling His real mission (Luke 19:10; John 10:3). Here the initiative of v. 1 is more completely fulfilled. Here is made clear the biblical principle that God is known by His particular revelation, not so much personal searching and discovery. What supreme compensation there is in being found by Jesus Christ! Here is fulfilled David's declaration: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10). Jesus' surely identifies the title "Son of Man," which He always uses of Himself, with Messiah (1:51; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28), especially according to the Jewish expectation of Daniel 7:13-14.⁶⁷ Certainly the healed man seems to understand this to be the meaning. The eye contact at this point must have been electrifying, with Jesus looking with such distinguishing gracious intent, and the man responding with uncertainty yet soul-throbbing hopefulness. His reasoning powers seize up!

b. Jesus saves the lost, vs. 36-38.

Here is a lost healed man who, for all of his newfound physical sight, remains blind in his soul. Certainly prevenient grace is drawing him to Jesus; he has become enlightened to a small degree, but this is preliminary, merely paving the way for a blaze of light that is about to break upon him.

(1) He discovers those who are thirsty, v. 36.

"That one answered and said, "And who is He, Lord [Sir], that I may believe in Him?" This is far from being a casual enquiry. In view of Jesus' ministry in this man's life already, as well as His purposeful approach, the man appears to be almost anticipating that which is about to be revealed. Surely he was well aware of messianic claims being disputed throughout Jerusalem. He is like Saul calling out, "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5), and the Philippian jailer enquiring, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Now He has drawn to the very edge of faith and awaits the final prompting of Jesus that will cause him to fall safely and securely into the bosom of this seeking Good Shepherd (10:3).

(2) He reveals Himself to those who are thirsty, v. 37.

"Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and He is that one speaking with you.'" As with the disreputable woman at the well (4:26), so here before a societal outcast, Jesus most plainly and intentionally reveals Himself. So Ryle further explains the divine purpose here.

So true is it that "the meek He will guide in judgment" [Ps. 25:9], and that things "hid to the wise and prudent are revealed to babes" [Matt. 11:25]. The

⁶⁷ Considerable manuscript evidence, as well as Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Cyril, and Augustine, understand "Son of God" here.

poor and despised and friendless among mankind are often those whom He favors with special revelations of His kindness and mercy (Matt. 5:110-12).⁶⁸

Thus Jesus explicitly declares Himself to be the Son of Man, and with considerable emphasis. Hence, “You have both seen and heard Him. Make no mistake about it!” Of course it is quite unnecessary to further point out that the man’s restored sight gives such persuasive validity to this claim. This man is smart enough to quickly come to such a conclusion.

(3) He elicits faith from those who are thirsty, v. 38.

“And He was saying, ‘I believe, Lord [Son of Man].’ And he worshipped [προσκυνέω, proskuneō] Him.” Now faith moves from the preliminary understanding of Jesus as a “man,” v. 11, as a “prophet,” v. 17, as “from God,” v. 33, to the vital acknowledgment that Jesus is “Lord,” and this by a monotheistic Jew. Surely the meaning here is different from that of v. 36. Now are the eyes of this man’s soul opened, and not before. He may yet be a babe, nevertheless he is newly delivered by the Spirit of God. Now faith has made the transforming leap from exploration to embrace, deliberation to determination, from consideration to consecration. Here is authentic faith, quite distinct from 2:23-25; 9:18. It is as Morris states concerning vs. 35-36, “wholehearted faith, literally ‘believing into,’ the faith that makes the believer one with Christ.”⁶⁹

Thus faith is signified by the response of “worship,” which basically means to fall prostrate before a potentate and kiss his feet or garment so as to indicate unqualified submission and adoration. Most likely the man similarly went down on his knees before Jesus. It is significant that every other use of “to worship” [προσκυνέω, proskuneō] and “worshipper” [προσκυνητής, proskunētēs] in John’s Gospel is with reference to the worship of God (4:20-24; 12:20). In Revelation, also written by John, this term describes either the worship of God and the Lamb of God, or the opposite worship of demons, the Beast and Dragon. It is important to note that Jesus accepts this worship, this adoration, without hesitation or qualification, in much the same way that Philip’s profession is received (20:27-29). Now the man can sing William Matson’s hymn:

Lord, I was blind! I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace;
But now the beauty of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.

6. The Jewish leaders with spiritual darkness receive condemnation, vs. 39-41.

The Jewish leaders having excommunicated the man born blind, it is likely they kept an eye on both he and Jesus. Their expectations were not disappointed. Hence on learning of the two having come together, some time afterward the Pharisees in particular, cf. vs. 18, 40, were quick to complain that a flagrant breach of their severe decree had

⁶⁸ Ryle, *John*, II, p. 190.

⁶⁹ Morris, *Reflections on John*, p. 363.

occurred. In this regard, they appear again to converse with Jesus. Though little did they expect the following bold revelation and censure of their unbelief.

- a. Jesus describes His two-fold function as the light of the world, v. 39.

“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing may see and that those seeing may become blind.’” We might paraphrase Jesus here: “For righteous adjudication/ discrimination [as distinct from 3:17; 12:47] I came into this world, so that as a consequence those who confess their blindness might see, and those who are so blind to their blindness, and thus claim to be able to see, might be confirmed in their blindness.” Light reveals not only purity but also impurity. Jesus, having become light to one man, is now the arouser of darkness in others, whereby they “conspire” and “plot” and attempt to “stone” Him (Matt. 12:14; 26:4; John 8:59; 10:31).

Paul describes this same dual purpose in that his gospel ministry is, “to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life” (II Cor. 2:16). Isaiah had a similar ministry (Isa. 6:8-10; cf. Mark 4:10-12). Thus Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the supreme issue of human destiny since, as Simeon declared that through Him, “thoughts [of faith or animosity] from many hearts will be revealed” (Luke 2:35). To some He is the light of the world and thus the light of their souls; such a revelation is gloriously illuminating. To others, he is an offence in that he exposes the world’s darkness, and the darkness of individual hearts in particular; such a revelation is intolerable and must be eliminated. Thus a man who walks away from the sun walks in the light of his own shadow/darkness; but if he walks toward the sun he leaves the darkness of his shadow behind him and is directed by pristine light (8:12).

- b. Jesus condemns the religious blind who claim they know God, vs. 40-41.

- (1) To the Jews, their blindness appears as light, v. 40.

“The Pharisees having heard these things, those being with Him also said to Him, ‘We are not blind, are we [surely not]?’” These Jewish rulers were rigidly confident in their incorrect assessment of Jesus. However He had earlier taught: “If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” (Matt. 6:23). If my truth is error, if my hope is in fact hopeless, if my knowledge is really an illusion, if my genuineness is fraudulent, if I call black to be white and white to be black, then I am supremely deluded. And the Jewish leaders here seem to suspect that they are being described in this manner. We are all prone to be more blind to our own defects than those of others. But here is the protestation of those who will not accept even the most obvious exposure; they are in total denial of that which is patently true. David was terribly blind to great sin, but when it was made clear to him, his repentance was profound (II Sam. 12:5-13; Ps. 51:3-4).

- (2) To Jesus, this blindness is responsible condemnation, v. 41.

“Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind [though you claim to see], you would not have sin; but now you say that ‘We see.’ [Therefore] your sin remains.’”

In other words Jesus says: “If you were as the man born blind, you would not be guilty of claiming to have sight that is the most serious form of blindness. This man was blind and knew it. You also are blind, but refuse to acknowledge it. Consequently, while this man would readily acknowledge his need of Me, you are unwilling to make such a confession. Thus you stand condemned as accountable for the highest form of blindness, ‘great darkness’ (Matt. 6:23).” Here then is the confession of those trafficking in untruth. While they say, “We see,” or “We are born again,” or “We have accepted Jesus Christ into our lives,” in reality they do not see; they are at best deluded; at worst they are religious devils (II Cor. 11:12-15). Surely this terrifying tragedy here will only be eclipsed on that day when the spurious light of such charlatans will be proven and exposed by God to be darkness (Matt. 7:22-23).

But how then can I check if my sight is real, the truth of my faith is true, my hope is sound, my knowledge is authentic, my conversion is legitimate, black is black and white is white? Consider several principles. First, judge your *motivation* for believing in Jesus Christ? Second, judge your *affections* after the manner of Peter, even when his sin of denying Christ was exposed (John 21:17). Third, judge your *experience* after the manner of the man born blind, v. 25. Fourth, judge your *priorities* in terms of your future ambitions in this life. Fifth, judge your *vision*. What did the Pharisees see? It was formal, institutional religion; it was Moses and self-righteousness. In contrast, what did the man born blind see? When his spiritual blindness was turned to spiritual sight, he first saw Jesus as the Son of Man (Heb. 2:9; 12:1-2).