

EXPOSITORY SERMON NO. SEVEN

SYMPTOMS OF UNBELIEF

John 7

Introduction

I. FEAST OF TABERNACLES

A. Describe the Feast: its meaning, its ceremonies, the rejoicing, the spectacle of it all (cf. comments Chap. 7, pgs. 15, 16, 17).

II. OMINOUS SHADOWS OF UNBELIEF CAST UPON THE FEAST

A. In spite of all the joy, ritual and splendor of the feast, its significance was ruined by the manifestations of unbelief. Ugly infidelity cast a pall over the whole joyous occasion and obscured the real lesson behind the feast. This festival was to remind the Jews of ancestral trust in God . . . it was to teach them of the Fatherly care of Jehovah in the wilderness journeys of their forefathers.

B. But when Jesus faced the people here with His claims it becomes evident that Judaism is rotten to the core with unbelief.

Discussion

I. UNBELIEF OF JESUS' BROTHERS, vs. 1-9

Notice that they admitted His supernatural character. They admitted that He performed miracles. But it says of them that "they did not believe on him." How can men admit the supernatural nature of Jesus and disbelieve in Him? Is such a contradiction possible? Remember the rulers of the Jews in Acts 4:15-16 who admitted the miracles of the apostles and could not deny them, but they refused to accept the message of the apostles. His brothers would not accept Him as a spiritual King over their wills and hearts. **THERE IS THE CRUCIAL POINT.** One may get many people today to say they believe in Christ and God and the Bible—*but* they do not want God's Word to rule over their minds, hearts and actions. This attitude is very prevalent among people today. You may see such people any Lord's Day, washing their cars, raking leaves, going to the lake or some other mockery of God. You may see them at the football games sitting on hard seats in bitter cold, screaming their lungs out, while twenty-two boys run back and forth over a field with a piece of pigskin. But these people can't get up on Sunday morning and come to church and sing and

worship the Lord who willingly hung on Calvary's cross for their sins. Oh, God, have mercy upon their souls! His brothers betrayed their weakness. Jesus told them that the world did not hate them as it did Him. The Lord is plainly indicating that their godly witness was weak—they were friends of the world, but enemies of God (Jas. 4:4-5). They had the worldly outlook. They mockingly betrayed their skepticism by chiding Jesus for staying in Galilee when He could be in Jerusalem doing His miracles and getting a worldly following toward His mission as Messiah. Remember the thousands of Jews as they walked the wilderness and beheld all the miracles of God, but murmured to return to the leeks and garlic of Egypt.

II. MISTAKING ERUDITION FOR HOLINESS, vs. 15-16; 47-49

Jesus had never attended the Jerusalem schools of the Pharisees. Immediately they crossed Him off their list as an unlearned ignoramus from the hills of Galilee. At once they threw up a barricade of self-willed prejudice against anything Jesus had to say. In verses 47-49 the Pharisees show that they believe scholarliness and law-keeping is the way to piety. There are many self-named "scholars" today who show the same symptoms of unbelief by attacking the Bible and Jesus as unphilosophical, unscientific and irrational. They demythologize the Scriptures—they attack fundamentalist preachers and small preacher training schools (loyal Bible Colleges). These "scholars" claim the real wisdom is to be found in their universities where the Bible is studied, not as the only supernatural revelation from God, but as a *work of man-conceived literature contemporary with Buddhism, Mohammedanism and other Oriental religions*. Paul faced the same situation in Corinth. Christians there were elevating the wisdom of men above a growth in knowledge of God's word. The Corinthians were placing value on eloquence, reason and rhetoric rather than the "foolishness of the cross." Great numbers of preachers today are too scientific and too reasonable to try to change men's hearts and convert them through preaching the gospel of atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ. To such the Gospel is outmoded. Scholarship and the evolutionary attainment of man now demands the preaching of a "social gospel"—raising the standards of living, one world government, etc. On the other hand, there are orthodox believers who maintain that study leads to salvation. They know the Book from "kivver to kivver" and have read it all the way through so many times. The Pharisees studied—memorized the Scriptures frontward and backward. They

counted the words, letters and paragraphs and knew every jot and tittle. But although they knew the Scriptures as no other men have known them since, they could not recognize the Messiah when He came (cf. John 5:39-47).

III. UNWILLINGNESS TO DO GOD'S WILL, v. 17

When the Jews rejected Jesus because they supposed Him to be unlearned and uneducated, He posed a statement that contains all the wisdom and supernatural insight of One who is able to read their very deepest meditations: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself" (v. 17). They were unwilling to do God's will—they had not the love of God in them (cf. John 5:42). Knowledge, as such, never produces love. No matter how much we know *about* Christ, our knowledge alone will never produce obedience. A certain amount of understanding and knowing God comes *only* from obedience or the desire to obey His will (cf. I John 2:3-5). See also John 8:47. This same stubborn unwillingness to do God's will led the Pharisees to reject the counsel of God, refusing to be baptized of John the Baptist (Luke 7:29-30). If we are not willing to do God's will, we shall desire to do Satan's will! There is no middle ground, no neutrality (cf. John 8:44). There must be that surrender—that giving up—of one's will to where one desires to do God's will. The man who wills to do God's will is the man Luke calls the "man of an honest and good heart." The fundamental equation is, then, (1) knowledge, (2) love, (3) obedience. Yet each of these three principles complement one another and interact. Knowledge of Jesus leads to love and obedience, while on the other hand, obedience leads to a full-grown knowledge of Christ and a more perfect love of Him (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). We never quite grasp the full significance and import of some of the more profound passages of Scripture until we have obeyed them or experienced them (like Job and David). A lifetime of studying the Bible is to no avail if a man's will and desire is out of harmony with God's will. Paul said the same thing in I Corinthians 2:6—3:9. The rebellious, carnal-minded man cannot discern the things of the Spirit, because the worldly-minded man has no desire to *do* God's will. **AND THIS IS JUST THE REASON SO MANY PEOPLE IN OUR DAY SAY THEY CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE. THEY HAVE NO DESIRE TO OBEY IT—NO DESIRE TO LIVE LIKE THE BIBLE DEMANDS THEY LIVE.** They cannot understand the New Testament concept of stewardship because they do not want to give

like the Bible demands. They cannot understand the Bible concept of worship and personal witnessing because they willeth not to do God's will!

IV. PREJUDICED AND SUPERFICIAL JUDGMENT, vs. 18-24

These Jews judged all teaching by how men heaped plaudits upon the teacher. They judged a man's teaching as to whether he sought honor and prestige and applause of others or not. Jesus did not seek His own glory, but the glory of the Father only. They also judged a man's teachings by the standards they themselves had set up. They had judged Jesus as a blasphemer and one possessed of demons because He had cured a man on the Sabbath and had broken their traditions. Jesus shows them just how superficial their judgment was. They circumcised babies on the Sabbath in order that the Law of Moses be not broken (in spite of their traditions). Now if they permitted this work of circumcision to be done, how could they be so shallow and unrighteous and unmerciful as to prohibit the healing of a man's body and bringing him to faith on the Sabbath? You see, making laws where God never made them is also evidence of unbelief! Judging others by man-made standards and by superficial, shallow prejudices is a symptom of unbelief.

Conclusion

- I. HAVE YOU ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS OF UNBELIEF?
 - A. Believing His supernatural character but not allowing Him to rule your heart?
 - B. Mistaking knowledge or personal merit for holiness?
 - C. Unwillingness to *do* God's will?
 - D. Prejudiced and superficial judgment?
- II. IF YOU DO, YOU ARE HARBORING SOMETHING MORE DEADLY THAN CANCER!
 - A. Flee to the Great Physician . . . partake of the Balm of Christ.
 - B. By His stripes you may be healed . . . ONLY TRUST HIM.
- III. IF YOU HAVE NOT OBEYED THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION, WHY NOT NOW?
 - A. A father once had a boy who liked to have his own way. He said to him one day, "Son, you ought not to want your own way—you ought to want God's way." After thinking a while, the son said, "Father, if I choose the will of the Lord and go His way because I *want* to, don't I still have my own way?"

IF WE LEARN THAT SECRET, WE HAVE LEARNED THE WHOLE SECRET OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. LET HIM HAVE HIS WAY WITH THEE . . . NOW!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Chapter Eight, omitting the interpolation of John 7:53—8:11, is a continuation of the Lord's discourses at the Feast of Tabernacles. This commentary will omit printing the text of John 7:53—8:11 for new textual evidence now makes it even more certain that this passage was not a part of the original text.

Our earliest and best Greek manuscripts do not contain this passage. Codex Vaticanus (B), Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) and Codex Washingtonianus (W)—three of the most important MSS—do not give the slightest indication that the story of the woman taken in adultery is part of the original. In fact, no Greek manuscript prior to the ninth century (with the exception of the bilingual manuscript Codex Bezae) has the story. None of the church fathers who wrote in Greek commented on this passage until the twelfth century, although many of them made reference to the passages which immediately precede and follow it.

A recent manuscript discovery (also in the Bodmer library) of a Coptic version of the Bible in the Bohairic dialect, contains the Gospel of John which is dated by its editor in the fourth century (300-400 A.D.). Passages which textual scholars have previously recognized as critically suspect (John 5:3b-4, etc.) and the passage under discussion (John 7:53—8:11) are not present in this manuscript.

The most crucial evidence against this spurious passage, however, comes from the Bodmer II Papyrus (P66). It is highly significant that this earliest complete text of John's Gospel does not have the account of the adulterous woman. There is no mark or hint at either 7:53 or 8:12 of this MS that either scribe or corrector knew anything additional belonging here (see Vol. I, p. 13, and Vol. II, Special Study No. One, pgs. 11, 12 for the value of Bodmer II in textual criticism).

In many of the late Greek manuscripts which do have the story, it is marked so as to inform the reader that it is an insertion. Furthermore, the manuscripts which have the account vary so much from each other in wording that there are at least sixty different readings. Someone has determined that this is an average of five variants for each verse of the twelve-verse unit—a much higher average than is found in the rest of John's Gospel. The account also occurs in other locations in the New Testament. Some have it after John 7:36; others after John 21:24; still others after Luke 21:38.

The style and vocabulary of the story in Greek are quite different from that which John employs in the rest of the book. It does not in any way contribute to John's account, but to the contrary, disrupts the context. How meaningful the two declarations of Jesus become—the "Water of Life" and the "Light of the World"—when we understand their setting coincident with the last day of the great Feast of Tabernacles. But if the unit 7:53—8:11 remains in the text of John's Gospel, then both the incident of the adulterous woman and the discourse on "light" occur at the Temple *on the day after the feast has closed*, for 8:2 reads, "Early in the morning he came again to the temple."

We, therefore, do not accept the passage John 7:53—8:11 as part of John's Gospel and have omitted it from our commentary. We continue our outline as follows:

II. The Word Manifested to the Jews and their rejection of Him, 1:19—12:50

D. Public Ministry, Third Year

2. Later Judean Ministry, 7:1—10:21, The Feast of Tabernacles

a. The Light of the World, 8:12-20

b. Fatal Unbelief, 8:21-30

c. Truth brings Freedom, 8:31-36

d. Abraham's Children, 8:37-40

e. Satan's Children, 8:41-47

f. Christ Defamed, 8:48-59

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Text 8:12-20

12 Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

13 The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true.

14 Jesus answered and said unto them, Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye know not whence I come, or whither I go.

15 Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

16 Yea and if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.

17 Yea and in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true.

18 I am he that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.

19 They said therefore unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither me, nor my Father; if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also.

20 These words spake he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man took him; because his hour was not yet come.

Queries

- a. What is the "light of life"?
- b. Does Jesus contradict Himself on the matter of judging? (vs. 15, 16.)
- c. What is the significance of the mention of the Treasury?

Paraphrase

Again Jesus addressed the people, saying, I am the Light of the world. The man who believes, obeys and follows Me will not wander, being lost in the darkness; but he will possess The Light which is life. At this the Pharisees said to Him, You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is therefore not valid. Jesus replied, My testimony is valid even though I do testify concerning Myself; because I know by direct knowledge where I come from and where I am going. But you are wilfully ignorant of where I came from and where I am going. You are judging me according to your worldly standards for a Messiah. I am not now primarily concerned with judging anyone. Yet even if I am judging, my judgment is true, because I am not alone in my judgment as a mere man but I am One with the Father who sent me. And in your own law, which you as Israelites are sole possessors, it is written, that the testimony of two men is valid. I am bearing witness concerning Myself and my Father who sent me is also bearing witness concerning Me. Then they said to Him, Where is your Father? Jesus answered, You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me as the Son of God, you would also know my Father. These words spake Jesus near the Treasury as He taught in the Temple. Yet no one arrested Him, because His hour had not yet come.

Summary

Jesus claims to be the Messiah—Light of the world. The Jews reject His testimony. Jesus aduces the Father's testimony on His behalf.

Comment

Jesus' discourse on the Light of the world here naturally connects with the former discourse on the Living Water (7:37-52). The significance of His claim to be the Light of the world is related to the

ceremony of lighting the great candelabra during the Feast of Tabernacles. Great candelabra with four receptacles for oil were placed in the inner court. The candelabra were so tall that the priests climbed ladders to light the oil. When they were lighted, the priests and the people "danced before the Lord" with joy. This was in commemoration of the blessing of the pillar of fire which led their fathers in the wilderness. What that pillar of fire was to Israel (leading them through darkness and the wilderness), Jesus is for the whole world. To the ignorant and unbelieving His light brings wisdom and faith; to the persecuted and downtrodden saint His light brings comfort and hope.

There are also the Old Testament prophecies which depict the Messiah as the Light of the World (cf. Isa. 9:1; 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Mal. 4:2; Lk. 2:32). The Pharisees were well aware of these prophecies and when Jesus claimed to be the Light of the world, they understood Him to be claiming to be the promised Messiah. For a discussion of the relationship between light and life and darkness, see our comments on John 1:4, Vol. I, pp. 23, 24.

To follow Christ means to trust and obey Him. We follow His words (Jn. 10:4) and His example (I Pet. 2:21; Jn. 13:15, 34, 35). When we place such complete trust in His Person and His precepts, we possess the Light which not only illuminates our life but is the very source of Life itself.

The Pharisees are alert to the inference that Jesus is claiming deity for Himself. They immediately reject His claims on the basis of insufficient evidence.

His answer (v. 14) is that His testimony alone ought to be accepted, for in reality He is not alone (v. 16). But He has come from a realm of existence where they can know nothing except they receive His testimony as true. Barnes illustrates it very well: "As they had not seen and known these things, they were not qualified to judge. An ambassador from a foreign court knows the will and purposes of the sovereign who sent him, and is competent to bear witness of it. The court to which he is sent has no way of judging but by his testimony, and he is therefore competent to testify in the case. All that can be demanded is that he give his credentials that he is appointed, and this Jesus had done both by the nature of His doctrine and His miracles." (Barnes' Notes on the N.T., Luke & John, p. 226.) Compare also this verse (v. 14) with John 5:31 (see our notes on Jn. 5:31, Vol. I, pp. 192-193).

In verses 15 and 16 Jesus goes to the heart of the problem. The Pharisees and the people judged Him after the flesh—that is, they compared His earthly appearance with their ideas of a worldly Messiah. His meekness, poverty and apparent powerlessness did not fulfill their ideal. Theirs was a superficial judgment and one made with minds closed to truth by preconceived ideas (cf. our comments on John 7:24, Vol. II, p. 24). In the Lord's emphatic statement, "I judge no man," He seems to contradict Himself in John 9:39, "For judgment came I into this world . . ." But the apparent contradiction vanishes when we understand that His primary purpose for coming into the world (salvation) necessitates self-condemnation upon all who reject Him (the only source of salvation). (See our notes on John 3:17-18, Vol. I, pp. 112-113.) Yet even if He does pronounce a judgment (as He apparently did in Matt. 11:20-24 upon the unrepentant cities; upon Jerusalem in Matt. 24:15-28), His judgment is just, valid and certain for He is One with the Father (see notes on John 5:19-23, Vol. I, pp. 184-186). What Jesus is saying is that His testimony and judgments are not made by Himself alone as would be the case with any other man, but He and the Father are perfectly united—their words and wills are in complete accord.

This is what He boldly and plainly declares in verses 17 and 18. The law to which He refers is in Deut. 17:6. He says "your law" because the law of Moses was exclusively given to the Jews and these scholars should have interpreted it correctly. They should have accepted this double testimony of Father and Son (for the testimony of the Father concerning the Son, see our comments on John 5:36-38, Vol. I, pp. 196-197).

Their question, "Where is your father?" was undoubtedly couched in sarcasm. He had made it plain enough for them to understand that His Father was the Invisible Jehovah. His answer to them is also very plain and candid. They did not know the Father and therefore they did not know His Son. They did not know the Son and therefore they could not know the Father (cf. John 5:37-43; 8:47). The *only* way to know God is to know Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:18; 14:6-11; Matt. 11:27).

Why would John mention the fact that Jesus was near the Treasury when He uttered these tremendous claims? Because the Temple Treasury was very near the council chambers of the Sanhedrin. It is possible that this group of men, now dedicated to kill Him, could hear Him as He taught. But no one arrested Him because in the Divine scheme of redemption, His hour had not yet come (see our comments on John 7:30, Vol. II, p. 29).

Quiz

1. How does the discourse on the Light of the World relate to the ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles?
2. How does the discourse on the Light of the World relate to the Old Testament?
3. In what two ways should we "follow" Jesus?
4. Why should men be expected to accept Jesus' witness to Himself?
5. How were the Pharisees judging Jesus?
6. Does Jesus contradict Himself in the matter of judging others?
7. How may we truly know the Father?

FATAL UNBELIEF

Text 8:21-30

21 He said therefore again unto them, I go away, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sin: whither I go, ye cannot come.

22 The Jews therefore said, Will he kill himself, that he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come?

23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

25 They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? Jesus said unto them, Even that which I have also spoken unto you from the beginning.

26 I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you; howbeit he that sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, these speak I unto the world.

27 They perceived not that he spake to them of the Father.

28 Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things.

29 And he that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him.

30 As he spake these things, many believed on him.

Queries

- a. What is the consequence of dying in sin?
- b. Why say "I am from above . . . ye are from beneath"?
- c. How would the Jews know that Jesus was the Christ after they had "lifted Him up"?

Paraphrase

So He said again to them, I am going away, and in your hour of death you will search for the Messiah and His salvation, but you will die in and under the sentence of your sin. Where I am going it is not possible for you as an unforgiven sinner to come. At these words the Jews began to ask among themselves, He is not going to kill Himself and be cast into hell, is He? Is that why He says, Where I am going it is not possible for you to come?

Jesus replied, You are from below; I am from above. You in your unregenerate nature, are of this condemned world. My nature is divine and I am not of this world. That is why I told you that you will die in and under the sentence of your sins. For if you do not trust and believe in Me as the Messiah and obey my words and become spiritually regenerate, you will die condemned in your sins.

The Jews said to Him, Just who are you anyway? Jesus replied, I am exactly the One of whom I have been telling you all along. I have many things to say and many judgments to bring concerning this nation. But, in spite of your rejection and unbelief, what I say is true and shall come to pass because He who sent Me is true and whatsoever I have heard from Him these things only do I speak to the world. They did not perceive that He was speaking to them of the Father so Jesus added, When you have crucified the Son of Man, then you will have evidence that I am the One sent from God and that of my own authority I do nothing but I say exactly that which My Father Jehovah has taught Me. And Jehovah who sent Me is with Me constantly. He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing unto Him.

As He said these things many believed on Him.

Summary

Jesus patiently warns these Jews again that their rejection of Him will be fatal for them. By their unbelief and disobedience they remain unregenerate and unable to follow Him into the presence of God. They will die with the wrath of God abiding upon them. When they shall have crucified the Man of Nazareth they will realize they have slain God's Son, but too late for many of them.

Comment

Behold the longsuffering and patience of the Son of God! He had been pleading with this nation and these people for over two years. He gave them signs and wonders to substantiate His claims. But again and again they blatantly repudiated them. Especially was this true here at the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. John 7:27, 30, 32, 35-36; 8:13, 19).

So He patiently explains to them once more concerning His divine nature and the absolute necessity of believing in Him. In verse 21 the Lord looks forward to His "exodus" from this world and His return to the right hand of the Father. There will come a time when many of the Jews now standing about Him will cry out in the hour of their death for the Messiah and the prophesied deliverance of the Messiah. Such a time actually came in 70 A.D. at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions. Millions of Jews were besieged within the walls of that city at Passover-time and suffered indescribable torments. Josephus, a Jewish general then captive of the Roman army, wrote a history of this terrible conflict, and said the lamentations of the people within the city exceeded even the noise of the battle! He also relates that there were many false Christs in the city at that time. People followed them in desperation, hoping until the terrible end for a Messiah to deliver them from the Romans. But many thousands died "in their sin." His words would be applicable, of course, to any of these Jews who, having come by any manner or at any time to their hour of death seeking the Messiah, had rejected Jesus as the Christ. Christ's warning here is for all mankind. There is only one end for men who deny Christ. They shall die in their sin.

What a fearful alternative to choose! To "die in one's sin" is to enter into eternity with the wrath of God abiding upon one (cf. John 3:36). It is to be called before the Righteous Judge of all the earth to pay the penalty decreed by this Judge for one's own sin. Sin *must* be paid for (cf. Rom. 2:3-16). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews illustrates from the reality of history that punishment for sin is inevitable *if* we neglect so great a salvation as may be found by faith and obedience to Christ (Heb. 2:1-4). Those men and women who are even now rejecting the Son of God are "judged already" (cf. John 3:18) and are "dead [separated eternally] in their sins" (cf. Eph. 2:1-2). When Christ returns, all the unrepentant and disobedient shall be sent away into everlasting punishment (cf. II Thess. 1:7-9).

And so these self-satisfied, unregenerate Jews would die "in their sins" and suffer the second death because of their sins. They would be eternally separated from the God whom they professed to worship. Jesus said plainly enough that they would not be able to go where He was going—namely, to the Father. Why, then, could they not understand? Why the sarcastic answer, "Will he kill himself, that he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come?"

Jesus both explains His warning and the reason for their misunderstanding in verses 23 and 24. They could never follow Him into heaven and the presence of Jehovah God because they were unregenerate. They were at enmity with God—rebellious and unrepentant. They were, in fact, children of the devil—"sons of disobedience" (cf. John 8:44). Christ plainly told a Judean Pharisee many months before this that a new birth was necessary for every man who wished to become a part of Jehovah's kingdom (cf. John 3:1-21). They were degenerate and their hearts, minds, desires, goals and actions had not been changed; they had not the love of God in them (cf. John 5:42) and thus they deliberately misunderstood and misrepresented every great spiritual truth uttered by Jesus. They were so wise they were foolish. What they needed to do was to become "fools" in order to partake innocently and open-mindedly of the wisdom of God (cf. I Cor. 2:1-16; 3:18-21). If men are to understand the wisdom of God they must have "honest and good hearts" (cf. Luke 8:15); they must "seek the things that are above" (cf. Col. 3:1-4; Phil. 4:8); they must "will to do the will of Christ" and then they will begin to understand (cf. John 7:17); and they must accept and rely upon the infallibly inspired revelation of God as the only true source of wisdom (I Cor. 2:1-16; John 8:31-32). Such men these Pharisees refused to be and thus their ludicrous question, "Will he kill himself . . ." etc.

They are actually mocking Jesus, for the Jews the deepest and darkest recesses of the regions of Gehenna claimed all those who committed suicide. Trusting in their religious heritage as sons of Abraham, they were positive they would not be able to follow this Nazarene to Gehenna. According to certain Jewish traditions, father Abraham will sit at Hell's gates and will not permit one son of Abraham to fall into its pits.

Hendriksen seems to have caught the spirit of the Jews in their question of verse 25 when he writes that they were "probably thinking that the best defense is an offense"; they attack Him with the scornful, "You, just who are you?" They are not interested in knowing who He is, for they have already settled that matter in their hearts, but they sneeringly demand, "How do you come to assume a role like this?" The Lord's answer to this jeer is not easy to interpret and is discussed at length by the various commentators. Essentially there are two conflicting interpretations: (a) "I am altogether, essentially or exactly, that which I am telling you from the beginning"; or, (b)

"How is it that I should even speak to you at all!" We are inclined to favor the first because it seems to be a better rendering of the original language. The second interpretation does not take proper account of *ten archen* (from the beginning).

By their *ad hominem* argument they hoped to put Jesus on the defensive and thus dispose of His penetrating judgments. If they can successfully attack His character and reject His authority, they will salve their consciences and justify their unbelief. This has been the point of attack by infidelity through the centuries. Christ's claims and His soul-searching doctrines are mocked and attacked as being those of a "deluded Jewish Rabbi."

Jesus will not be side-tracked in His aim to reveal to these Jews their necessity for conversion. As the Messiah, it was His prophetic duty to be the "arm of Jehovah's judgment" (cf. Isa. 11:3; 51:5; Micah 4:3). He had many piercing judgments to make concerning this nation and these men. And in spite of their attacks upon Him—in spite of their rejections and unbelief—they could not change the truth of His pronouncements. For He came forth from Jehovah who is Truth and Son and Father are One. Both the Son and the Father agree in word, will and deed (cf. John 5:19). The judgments made and the sentences pronounced by the Son are exactly the same as those of God the Father (cf. John 3:11; 5:30; 32, 37; 7:16).

Again the Jews must have given evidence in some manner that what Jesus was speaking was beyond their carnal comprehension. They had already prejudged Jesus as a "demon" because He spoke of suicide. If what Jesus said before was beyond their comprehension, certainly His statement concerning the "lifting up of the Son of man" would present an incomprehensible enigma to their hardened hearts.

By the statement in verse 28, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he," Jesus looks forward to His crucifixion. Not merely the crucifixion only, but the resurrection, the appearances and the manifestation of His ascension on the day of Pentecost is also included. Some scholars reject the idea that Jesus may be referring to the crucifixion as the motivating power behind the conversion of three thousand on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36). We believe, to the contrary, that His passion did offer testimony which caused some of the Jews to turn to Him and become followers of the Way. Even the Roman centurion was touched in the very depths of his soul as he witnessed the crucifixion of the Nazarene (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39). We quote here the comments of R. C. Foster in his Syllabus of the Life of Christ concerning verse 28:

"Jesus refers to His crucifixion and how His divine personality and God's spiritual program will become plain to them in His death. Some in the crowd are earnestly trying to understand and believe; some are maliciously determined not to believe, but Jesus is sympathetic and kind. He realizes how hard it is for them to understand the mysterious program of God and patiently explains that they will be able to see clearly later that which seems beyond comprehension now."

When Jesus said, "lifted up, etc., . . ." He meant not only the crucifixion, but all the culminating works of God in His Son. Naturally, the crucifixion without the resurrection would be powerless to convict and convince these people of Christ's deity. Just as the crucifixion without the resurrection would not be able "to draw all men unto Him" (cf. John 12:32). Thus we believe Jesus means the entire process of the glorification of the Son (death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost), when He says, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he." Yes, after these things many would come to know Jesus as the Christ—the One from the very bosom of Jehovah-God. Some would cry out in faith and repentance, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" These would be told the gospel plan of salvation (Acts 2:38). But many others, unable to deny the facts (Acts 4:15-16), would still reject Jesus as the Messiah because they "loved the glory that is of men rather than the glory that is of God" (cf. John 12:42).

Verse 29 is a beautiful lesson on how we may have God with us. We need only follow the example of Jesus and attempt always to do the things pleasing to God. If we keep His commandments we abide in the love of Christ even as He kept His Father's commandments and dwelt in the Father's continual love and presence (cf. John 15:10).

We remember the man David, "a man after God's own heart," that he attempted always to do that which pleased God. God's presence was always very near to David—God was an "ever-present help" to him.

Verse 30 tells us that many believed on Him, and verse 31 indicates that He addressed His next discourse to those who "believed." But how sincere was their "belief"? Read ahead in the text, verses 31 through 59, and it is singularly evident that their faith was not one of surrender and change of heart. As Hendriksen says, "whether the

faith here indicated is genuine or not will have to be indicated by the following verses [the context]." The context certainly indicates that it was not genuine. There are other instances where people were said to have believed on Jesus, but their faith was far from that which changes men's hearts (cf. John 2:23; 7:31; 12:42). There were many who thought they believed in Him as the Messiah. Perhaps they professed their beliefs aloud—or perhaps Jesus looked upon their hearts and saw a superficial faith which they dared not express. At any rate, He begins, in verse 31, addressing these people and showing them that their faith was short of the mark. It did not even measure up to the faith of the one they claimed as their father, Abraham (cf. vs. 39-40).

Quiz

1. When did the Jews seek the Messiah most fervently? At what other time would they seek a Saviour, but "die in their sins"?
2. What is meant by "die in your sins"?
3. Why could the Jews not follow Jesus when He should go away?
4. Why the sarcastic question, "Will he kill himself . . . etc."?
5. Of what does Jesus speak when He says, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man . . . etc."?
6. How may we be sure of God's presence with us?
7. How did these Jews "believe" in Jesus?

TRUTH BRINGS FREEDOM

Text 8:31-36

- 31 Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples;
 32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
 33 They answered unto him, We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?
 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin.
 35 And the bondservant abideth not in the house forever: the son abideth for ever.
 36 If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Queries

- a. How does the truth make a person free?
- b. How does sin enslave?
- c. What does Jesus mean, "the bondservant abideth not in the house forever"?

Paraphrase

So Jesus said to those Jews who had said they believed in Him, If you are living and dwelling in My word, then you are beyond doubt My followers, and you will apprehend and experience the truth and the truth will liberate and emancipate you. They answered Him, We are the descendants of Abraham, a chosen people above all that are upon the face of the earth, and we have never given ourselves into bondage to anyone—God alone is our Master. How can you dare to say, You will be set free from bondage? Jesus answered them, I assure you most solemnly, Whosoever continually practices sin is the prisoner and slave of sin. Now those who are slaves may enjoy the privileges of the household temporarily, but not permanently, but the son remains forever. If, therefore, the son liberates the slave and he is adopted into a family relationship, then you are really and unquestionably free.

Summary

Abiding in the doctrine of Christ constitutes genuine discipleship. All else is enslavement to sin. Servitude to Christ brings genuine freedom. The Jews, by their sin, have become slave and have no permanent dwelling place within the kingdom. They must be set free through the authority of the Son in order to have a permanent place within God's household.

Comment

It is very evident that Jesus is addressing His remarks to a group of the Jews here at the Feast of Tabernacles who had, in some way, manifested a superficial belief in Him. They wanted to believe in a Messiah, but not *the* Messiah. They were willing to follow, fight or die for a temporal King, but they would have none of a spiritual King who demanded sovereignty over their motives and deeds. They would gladly serve Him with their lips, but not their hearts.

And in verse 31 Jesus plainly declares the requirements for genuine discipleship to the *true* Messiah. To abide in His word is to make it one's dwelling place—to live by it as the Bread of Life (see our comments on John 6:56, Vol. I, page 250). His word is the only source of life (cf. John 6:63) and to abide in it is to keep it stedfastly (cf. I Cor. 15:58; Acts 2:42; Col. 1:23; II John 9). In John 13:35 Jesus tells how we are to witness our discipleship to the world—by loving one another as He has loved us.

Now in verse 32 comes the beautiful paradox. To become really and absolutely free, every man must submit himself to servitude to Christ's word. Much more than intellectual recognition is involved in "knowing" the truth as Jesus means it. To "know the truth" is also to do it, to experience it (cf. John 7:17; Psa. 1). There are those who are aware of the truth but do not "know" it, because they refuse to live according to precepts of truth (cf. John 3:19, see our comments, Vol. I, page 114).

When Jesus says *truth* He means all that is embodied in the Life He manifested and the doctrines He taught—both in His Incarnation and by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (cf. John 1:14, 17; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17). That which is truth is that which is real, genuine and veritable. The truth is not a philosophical abstraction which is reached by the reasoning of the human mind. It is not relative to time, change or feeling. Truth, all truth, originates in God and is divine and everlasting fact. See also these references: Psa. 25:10; 119:142, 151, 160; Eph. 4:21. The truth which Jesus brings and wishes men to trust in is the eternal verities of God which are in contradistinction to things which are temporal (cf. II Cor. 4:18—5:7; Jn. 6:27; Heb. 12:27; I Jn. 2:15-17; Psa. 102:25-26). But the truth of God abides forever and is unchangeable (cf. I Pet. 1:22-25; Heb. 13:8).

Those who abide in these eternal verities and "walk by faith and not by sight" are those who are unquestionably free. The man who depends entirely upon human wisdom certainly cannot be free for He is imprisoned by the very limitations of human reason! That the mind of the flesh cannot possibly plumb the depths of wisdom is evident from Romans, the first chapter, and from I Corinthians, chapters one through three. The truth that is found in Christ gives men freedom in at least three ways: (a) Freedom from the habits and enslavements of the flesh can come only through knowledge and obedience of the truth; (b) freedom from spiritual lies, falsehoods, deceptions and prejudices which evil men use to enslave the minds and souls of men and women through their perversions of the truth; (c) freedom from sin and all its consequences—guilt, fear of death, penalty and sentence of sin which is eternal death.

Freedom or victory through the truth of God is the theme of the great apostle Paul's eighth chapter of Romans, Galatian epistle, and eighth, ninth and tenth chapters of First Corinthians. We like the way Hendriksen says it: N. T. Commentary, Gospel of John, Vol. II, page 5, "One is free, therefore, not when he can do what he wishes to

do, but when he wishes to do and can do what he should do."

Religiously the Jews enjoyed a unique position among all the peoples of the earth until after Christ brought truth and salvation to the Gentiles. They alone were the repositories of God's revealed will for men. An illustrious remnant of Israel had never been, enslaved to idolatry or philosophical schemes of religion. Especially would the Pharisees claim to be free of all the passions and failures of the flesh common to other men for they, by their tradition-enforced asceticism remained aloof from the more sensual indulgences of the flesh. One commentator has paraphrased their reply in verse 33 like this: "If the truth you speak of is good only for slaves, do not trouble us, *Abraham's seed*, with it! We are a freeborn, royal nation and acknowledge no one as our master save God. To him we belong as children and to no one else. This is the *truth* which makes us free!" (cf. Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6; Amos 3:2; Jn. 8:41). They wanted to be sure that they were not connected with the other line of descendants of Abraham—namely, Ishmael, the son of the handmaid who was cast out (cf. Gen. 21:10; Gal. 4:21-31). Remember, also, that Abraham was in the line of Shem and it was prophesied that the descendants of Ham would be servants of Shem's offspring (cf. Gen. 9:25-26). Although they had been politically subservient for hundreds of years to many different rulers (excepting brief periods of temporary freedom) within their hearts burned a fierce freedom of spirit and worship of the One True Jehovah-God. Many Jews through the ages had spilled their very life's blood defending this religious freedom. Even during the Roman rule hundreds were beheaded for refusal to worship the Roman emperor or heathen idols.

Little did they realize, however, that they were slaves to the most binding of all masters, sin! Verse 34 is Jesus' answer to the Jews. When He says "committeth sin," He uses the present participle, *ho poion* (the one doing), which indicates not merely a single sin, but to live a life of continual sin (cf. I Jn. 3:6, 8, 9). This bondage to sin is true of every man who has not been freed from sin by belief and obedience to the Gospel. The libertine is indeed the most wretched of slaves—enslaved to passions and controlled by his flesh. His very soul is a prisoner mastered by his appetites and sensory organs. He allows his will and reason to be controlled by lust. Any man who allows himself to be dominated and led about by sinful habit is a

slave. Such a man does not do what he likes, but he does what sin likes! He has allowed a pleasure to master him so completely that he cannot do without it. That man is a slave to sin and ignorance of the truth who allows himself to be deluded and duped by false doctrines and perversions of the truth. Paul had to fight and battle constantly for his own freedom in Christ and the freedom of the Gentile Christians against the Judaizers. The church has had to wage a constant war for freedom from evil men who would bring men into bondage by prejudice, perversion of the truth and going beyond the things that are written. Men who do not "know the truth" soon become slaves to their sinful ignorance (cf. Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:1). Finally, sin enslaves man by guilt, fear of death, and penalty or sentence pronounced. It is this guilt and burden of condemnation which keeps sinners from realizing joy, peace and fulfillment in their hearts. Every man has some conscience and feels some sense of guilt and condemnation through it (cf. Rom. 2:14-16). All men are guilty (cf. Rom. 3:19; Jas. 2:10). Men were in bondage to the fear of death until Jesus came and conquered death (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). That men in sin are men in bondage is evident from these Scriptures: Prov. 5:22; Acts 8:23; Rom. 6:16-23, 7:23; II Tim. 2:26; II Pet. 2:19. Praise be to God, the Truth was manifested in the flesh to bring sight to the blind, release to the captives and to set at liberty the bruised (cf. Lk. 4:18). Freedom from sin means, on one hand, "deliverance from all created forces that would prevent men from serving and enjoying their Creator, and on the other, the positive happiness of living in fellowship with God in the place where He is pleased to bless." "Christian liberty is precisely freedom to love and serve to the fullest extent, and is therefore abused when it is made an excuse for loveless license (Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 2:16; II Pet. 2:19; I Cor. 8:9-12).

Men in bondage to sin cannot be sons of God; they are slaves to the devil. A slave may remain within the house, but he is not a permanent member of the household and has no inheritance or can claim no rights. The slave may be driven out or sold at any time (cf. Hagar and her son). Thus Jesus gives a solemn warning to these Jews who could not see their need for regeneration. They were not children of God, but slaves of sin, and unless they become sons of God by adoption—through faith in Jesus Christ—they were in danger of being cast out. He had warned them before that they could not follow Him to Heaven because they were unregenerate (8:21-24). This is the same warning couched in different language. If they expect to be

"carried to Abraham's bosom in paradise" they must become true sons of Abraham by faith and regenerate obedience (cf. vs. 39-40).

The Son is the rightful heir and abides forever in the house. If by his authority the slave is set free, he shall be free indeed. The "indeed" in this case means more than mere freedom. When a man is freed from his slavery to sin by the Son of God, the former slave is not only pardoned and freed from his shackles, but he is adopted into the family and given the place of a fellow-heir (cf. Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1-7).

Quiz

1. What is required to become "truly" a disciple of Jesus?
2. What is involved in "knowing" the truth?
3. What is truth?
4. Name the three freedoms which come from knowing the truth.
5. How could the Jews claim freedom from bondage?
6. What brings every man into bondage? How?
7. Explain the figure of "slave" and "Son" abiding in the household.

ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

Text 8:37-40

37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; yet ye seek to kill me, because my word hath not free course in you.

38 I speak the things which I have seen with my Father: and ye also do the things which ye heard from your father.

39 They answered and said unto him, Our father is Abraham. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God: this did not Abraham.

Queries

- a. What does Jesus mean by his word having "free course"?
- b. What were the "works of Abraham"?
- c. How did Jesus know they were seeking to kill him?

Paraphrase

Yes, I know that according to the flesh you are Abraham's descendants; yet you are seeking to kill me, because my word has found no place for freedom of progress within you. I am telling you the things which I have seen while in the very presence of My Father, and what you are doing indicates who your father is and what you have heard

from him. They replied, Our father is Abraham! Jesus then said, If you were truly Abraham's children you would follow Abraham's example and do as he did; but instead you are eager to kill me, a person who has spoken nothing but the truth to you—and the ultimate truth which I heard in the presence of God. This certainly is not the way Abraham did.

Summary

The discussion previous to this concerning freedom has led the Jews to deny bondage and defend their freedom on the basis of descendancy from Abraham. Jesus recognizes their fleshly relationship to Abraham, but hints that their spiritual father is someone besides Abraham as manifested by their hate and intentions of murder.

Comment

They had reminded Jesus that they were the descendants of Abraham, presumptuously denying any type of bondage upon the basis of this heritage. Jesus concedes their physical lineage to Abraham, but He reveals a spirit of hate and evil within their hearts which is as foreign to the nature of Abraham as is darkness to light. It had been openly visible that the Jews were seeking some way to put Him to death (cf. Jn. 5:18; 7:19, 25, 30, 32, 45). Even if the Jews had tried to hide their murderous envy, the Searcher of hearts would have known it, for "he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man" (cf. Jn. 2:25).

In the very same breath (v. 37), Jesus tells the Jews the basic reason for their spiritual apostacy from being true descendants of Abraham. They would not allow His word to run a free course within their hearts. Vine says the verb *choreo* ("free course") means literally, "to make room for; to go forward." Other lexicographers define it, "be in motion, go forward, make progress." Paul said much the same thing in II Thessalonians 3:1 when he asked the brethren there to pray that "the word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified" in him. There are many Scriptures which might be applied and contrasted to the Lord's accusation that the Jews would not allow His word to progress within their hearts and space will not allow us to mention them all. Perhaps the best illustration for what is intended here may be found in Christ's parable of the different soils in Mat-

thew the thirteenth chapter (cf. also Mk. 4:1-34; Lk. 8:4-18). In this parable Jesus vividly portrays different things which prohibit the word of God from having free course in men's hearts—wilfull rejection, shallow emotionalism and choking desire for material gain (see also the entire 119th Psalm).

In verse 38 Jesus states again, what He has told the Jews over and over; namely, that His teachings were delivered to Him by the Father when He was dwelling in the presence of the Father (cf. Jn. 5:19, 30; 7:28-29). He is implying that they should know He is from Jehovah by His teaching and His deeds; He knows their father, the devil, because of what they are seeking to do! Men are either sons of the heavenly Father by faith and obedience (Rom. 8:1-17), or they become sons of the father of Hell by disobedience (cf. Eph. 2:1-3; 5:6-8).

As the Lord points out in verse 39, it makes little difference whose children we profess to be. Actions speak louder than words (cf. Mt. 7:15-23)! They claimed to be Abraham's children, but refused to walk in his steps. Just who are the children of Abraham? They are men of faith and righteousness (cf. Rom. 4:3, 16); they are men of hope (Rom. 4:18); they are men of trust and obedience (Gal. 3:6); they are those who have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-29); they are those of the New Covenant, New Israel, the Church of Christ (cf. Rom. 9:6-8); they are men who have purified their hearts (cf. Rom. 2:28-29); they are men who show their faith by their works (cf. James 2:21-24).

Abraham was a man of implicit faith and trust in God who dared to obey God without questioning His commands (cf. Heb. 11:8-19). He was a man willing to prove his faith and trust in Jehovah even if it demanded the life of his only-unique son, Isaac. He was a man of righteousness and good works who cared for his nephew, Lot, and prayed for his deliverance from God's wrath. He welcomed and obeyed God's messengers. His great faith even caused him to look down through the centuries rejoicing in the future coming of Christ as though it were a reality to him in his own day! Abraham was indeed, the friend of God.

It is very evident, then, that these Jews are far from being children of Abraham in the best sense. All they could lay claim to from Abraham was physical ancestry. But that did not make them children of God at all (cf. Jn. 1:12-13; Matt. 3:7-10).

While claiming to be Abraham's sons and heirs to the kingdom of God they were plotting the murder of the very Son of God (cf. Mt. 21:33-46; Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19). As Lenski says, "One would expect of the physical sons of Abraham that they more than all men would turn out to be also Abraham's spiritual sons," but their real sonship is revealed by themselves as that of sons of the devil "who was a murderer from the beginning."

Quiz

1. How does the word of God have free course in men?
2. How may we know a man's spiritual father?
3. Name six characteristics of the true descendants of Abraham and give the Scripture references.
4. Give at least one Scripture reference showing that physical lineage does not make one a son of God.

SATAN'S CHILDREN

Text 8:41-47

41 Ye do the works of your father. They said unto him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but He sent me.

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof.

45 But because I say the truth, ye believe me not.

46 Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?

47 He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Queries

- a. What do the Jews mean by saying, "We were not born of fornication"?
- b. Why did the Jews not understand Jesus' teaching?
- c. What do we learn of the nature of the devil in this section?

Paraphrase

You are manifesting the nature and doing the works of your spiritual father, the devil. They replied, We are the children of our true father, even God, and we are not the illegitimate children of a spiritually adulterous union with another father. Jesus said to them, If you were the children of the true Father, God, then you would honor Me as His Son and love Me, for I came here from the presence of the Father to be among men; I have not come merely upon my own authority and witness, but manifesting the authority of the Father. Why will you not understand what I say to you? It is because you wilfully refuse to receive my message into your hearts. You are the offspring of your father, the devil, and it is evident because you intentionally do the schemes and works of your father, the devil. He planned and executed the murder of the human race in his heart from the beginning of the world, and he has not one iota of relationship to the truth because there is no truth in his nature. When he lies he merely speaks out of the very essence of his nature for he is a liar and the originator of the lie itself. It is plainly for the very reason that I say the truth that you do not believe in Me. Yet, which of you is able to prove Me guilty of ever committing a sin or telling a lie? He that is a child of God will hear God's words. And this is just the reason you will not hear His message which I have brought, because you are not akin to the nature of God.

Summary

Jesus openly charges these Jews with being the children of Satan. Then He vividly gives the reasons for this terrible indictment. The Jews are exhibiting the nature of the devil by their rebellion to God's Son, their lies, and their open intention to kill Jesus. They cannot be the children of God for they reject His word, not erroneously, but wilfully.

Comment

In rebuttal to Christ's inference that they were bondservants to sin, these Jews had vociferously claimed descendance from Abraham (cf. 8:33). Now Jesus infers more pointedly than ever that Abraham is not their father. The Lord is talking about spiritual kinship! He admitted their physical relationship to Abraham (v. 37), but denied

their spiritual kinship (v. 39) to him. And now, in verse 41, Jesus implies that they are the offspring of a spiritual father other than Abraham.

Their pride wounded and their ire aroused, these men exclaim "We were born of no adulterous union, we have never had any spiritual father but Jehovah-God." In the Old Testament God was, in a special sense, the Father of Israel (cf. Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Malachi 2:10). When Israel forsook Jehovah and worshipped any other God, she was said to have gone awhoring after strange gods—to have committed spiritual adultery (cf. Judges 2:17; I Chron. 5:25; Ezek. 6:9; Hosea 2:4; 4:12; 5:4).

As most commentators point out, either one of two meanings may have been intended here in the answer of these Jews. When they said to Jesus that they were not the children of any adulterous union, they might have meant (a) they did not belong to a nation of idolaters—spiritual adulterers, or (b) they were not born physically of adulterous parents—inferring that Jesus was, for the Jews had very early circulated the story that Mary, mother of Jesus, had been unfaithful to Joseph and had a lover—a Roman soldier by the name of Panthera—and that Jesus was the child of this adulterous union. In view of the context, we prefer the first interpretation. These Jews knew that Jesus was talking about their spiritual relationship to God for they defended themselves by claiming God as their Father. By emphasizing their spiritual kinship to God they were inferring that Jesus was Himself the spiritual descendant of another father (the devil) (cf. 8:48).

Jesus states in verse 42 a very basic truth. The spiritual parentage of any man is known by his manifest relationship to Jesus Christ. The Lord said it earlier in this manner, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (cf. Matt. 7:15-20; also Jn. 5:42-43, 46; I Jn. 5:1). William Barclay says it so well, "Here again is the key thought of the Fourth Gospel. The test of a man is his reaction to Jesus . . . To be confronted with Jesus is to be confronted with judgment. Jesus 's the touchstone of God by which all men are judged.'" (The Gospel of John, Vol. 2, by Wm. Barclay, p. 33, Saint Andrew Press.) If they were true loving, obedient, believing children of God they would have loved Jesus because He came revealing Himself as the Incarnate God. He gave abundant witness to His claims by signs and wonders performed in their very midst (cf. Matt. 9:1-8). Their trouble was that

they did not want Him as their Messiah—they refused to surrender their ideas to the will of God and, as a result, refused to recognize Jesus (cf. John 7:17).

The Great Cross-examiner continues with His indictment. The next few verses (43-47) contain tremendously incriminating questions and statements. The Divine Barrister not only elicits the facts of the case, but He also lays bare the motives of those indicted.

Jesus asks them the piercing question, "Why do ye not understand my words?" And before they have opportunity to deny or rail irrelevantly He answers for them the answer that is evident to all honest-hearted men—they simply refuse to hear His teaching, not out of ignorance, but out of their rebellious and evil nature. They are like their forefathers of whom the prophet wrote, "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (Jer. 6:10). (cf. Ezek. 12:2; Zech. 7:11; Matt. 11:25-26; II Tim. 4:4; I Cor. 2:14.) They could not understand because they *would* not hear. They could not understand the spiritual nature of Christ's Messiahship because they wilfully carnalized their hearts.

Their failure to recognize Jesus as the Christ is due, as Jesus continues to explain, to their willing submission to the devil. They voluntarily became satan's cohorts. There is the answer; terrifying in all its stark reality and horrible implications. They cannot bear or tolerate the truth of God, so they embrace false doctrine and willingly choose error and lies rather than truth. Thus they become sons of Hell—offspring of satan—for the devil by his very nature stands in no kinship whatever to the truth. It is his very nature and work to deceive and when he speaks a lie, he merely expresses his character. He was a murderer from the beginning of time. He seduced the whole human race when he deceived Adam and Eve. He brought the penalty of death upon us all in the Garden.

The verdict in the charge against these Jews, then, must be "Guilty." They were seeking how they might kill Jesus who was completely innocent of any of their accusations—hence they were murderers at heart. Not only that, they could not tolerate the truth and thus they manifested their spiritual kinship to the devil.

What a morally impeaching indictment verse 45 brings upon these Jews. Because Jesus spoke the truth, they rejected Him. There was no doubting now whose side they were on—the devil's. How reprobate has a man become when truth is rejected because it is truth and error is received and practiced because it is error (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Are there not those today, even in the guise of being religious seekers after the truth, who reject truth because it is truth and receive a lie because it is a lie?

Then comes the challenge, "Which of you is able to convict me of sin?" What a dramatic moment! None but the Son of God would dare to make such a challenge. There must have been a silent pause while Jesus waited for anyone to speak out. Were there none who could convict Him of some sin or falsehood? Not one! Neither here nor forever after! By their silence they admitted that they could find no sin, falsehood or inconsistency in Him—*then why did they not accept His words?*

The answer is inevitable! They were not, as they claimed to be, sons of God. The man that is of God (or is disposed toward righteousness, truth, justice and the attributes that are God's nature) will listen and endeavor to obey God's word. But these men were haters of the truth and lovers of darkness (cf. John 3:19-21) and it was evident that they were not of God.

May God grant us the wisdom, courage and conviction to accept the truth (wherever it is) because it is the truth, and reject that which is false (wherever it is) because it is false?

Quiz

1. What did the Jews probably mean by their answer, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God"?
2. What is the basic truth asserted in verse 42?
3. Why could they not understand Jesus' words?
4. What is significant in verse 45?
5. What is the inevitable answer to Jesus' questions in verse 46?

CHRIST DEFAMED

Text 8:48-59

48 The Jews answered and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon?

49 Jesus answered, I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me.

50 But I seek not mine only glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.

51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death.

52 The Jews said unto him, Now we know that thou hast a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my word, he shall never taste of death.

53 Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who died? and the prophets died: who makest thou thyself?

54 Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing: it is my Father that glorifieth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God;

55 and ye have not known him: but I know him; and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be like unto you, a liar: but I know him, and keep his word.

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.

57 The Jews therefore said unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, I am.

59 They took up stones therefore to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

Queries

- a. Why accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan?
- b. How will belief in Jesus keep men from "seeing" death?
- c. How could Abraham "see Jesus' day"?

Paraphrase

The Jews answered and said to him, Are we not right when we are saying that you are a Samaritan heretic and that you are possessed of a demon? Jesus answered, I am not demon-possessed but quite to the contrary I honor my Father while you dishonor Him by dishonoring Me. However, to seek self-glorification is not My purpose. Even though men may dishonor Me there is One, even God, who is seeking after and taking care of glorifying Me and He is judging those who dishonor Me. I tell you most solemnly if any man keeps My word he will never experience death unto all eternity. The Jews said to Him,

Now we know for sure that you are possessed of a demon. Abraham died and the prophets also died; yet you say, If a man keeps My word he will never taste death unto all eternity. Are you actually claiming that you are greater than our father Abraham? Both he and all the prophets experienced death; just who do you make yourself out to be? Jesus answered, If I glorify Myself, My glory would be vain. It is My Father, whom you call, Our God, that continues to glorify Me; and you have not come to know Him—but I know Him. If I should deny that I know Him as His only unique Son then I would be a liar like you who say you know Him and do not! But I know Him perfectly and keep His word. Your forefather Abraham was extremely happy that he was to see My day, and he saw it and rejoiced. The Jews therefore said to Him, You have not even lived fifty years and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, I do solemnly assure you that before Abraham was born I am living as I have been and shall be for all eternity. So they picked up stones in order to hurl them at Him. But Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.

Summary

Jesus is attacked for His tremendous claims of having power to overcome death and of pre-existence. The Jews rightly recognized that Jesus was claiming supernatural powers, but they, in their carnality, accused Him of heresy and demon possession.

Comment

Some men will always react as these Jews did when their sins and their real nature is revealed; they will slander, back-bite and call names. The Jews could not defend themselves against the overwhelming logic of Christ's words (verses 41-47), so they made derogatory remarks about Him personally.

Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy and evil intentions and had related them to the devil—they were the devil's children. The Jews counter-charged, "You're another!" The participle *legomen* (saying) in verse 48 is in the present tense (continuing action). It may mean that the Jews were continually muttering, "Samaritan," "heretic," "demon," all the time Jesus was addressing them (cf. our paraphrase of this verse). To call Jesus a Samaritan was to call Him a heretic and schismatic because the Samaritans were thus regarded by the Jews (cf. our comments, Vol. I, pages 141-142).

Some commentators argue that since Jesus did not answer the charge of being "a Samaritan," it is doubtful that the Jews really called Him a Samaritan. These commentators claim that what we have in the English word "samaritan" may be a translation of the Aramaic *Shomeroni*, (meaning Samaritan), which, in turn, may be a corruption of the Aramaic word *Shomeron* (which means, prince of the devils). Thus John actually meant to record the Jews as saying, "Say we not well that thou art the prince of demons, and hast a demon?" But where did these commentators get the idea that John wrote his gospel in Aramaic? The weight of evidence presented by early Greek manuscripts (and now the Bodmer II) is overwhelmingly in favor of John's gospel being written originally in the Greek language. We dismiss this argument as unproven and irrelevant.

We like Lenski's comment as to why Jesus did not answer their charge of being "a Samaritan." Lenski says, ". . . Jesus touches only the second epithet hurled at him . . . because that is enough for the contrast he is bringing out between what he is doing and what they are doing. Moreover, while these Jews utterly despise the Samaritan, Jesus does not . . ." (Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, by R. C. H. Lenski, page 658).

He did answer, however, their charge of demon-possession. And He answered it in much the same way He had answered the Pharisees in Galilee (cf. Matt. 12:22-30), ". . . and if Satan casteth out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" Jesus' answer was simply, "How can I honor the Heavenly Father and be demon-possessed?" If He was a servant of Satan He would be honoring Satan and dishonoring God—but the exact opposite is true. He honored the Father in everything He said or did, while they dishonored the Father by reviling God's Son (cf. John 5:23).

Jesus continues, "It matters little that you dishonor Me, as far as My own self-pride is concerned, for I do not seek to glorify Myself simply for the glory involved." Jesus never sought the honor of men as an end to be desired. He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . he humbled himself, becoming obedient . . . to the death of the cross," (cf. Phil. 2:6-8). He, though He was the Son, lowered Himself, left Heaven and took upon Himself mortal flesh and experienced subjection and obedience by the things which He suffered (cf. Heb. 5:8). When even His own disciples were contending about places of honor He girded Himself with a towel and took a basin of water and performed the lowliest of services in washing their feet

(cf. John 13:1-17). The Lord Jesus Christ did not concern Himself with seeking praise and honor of men. The matter of maintaining and vindicating His honor is in other, proper hands—the Father's hands.

The Father honored Jesus through His self-assumed humility (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). Although men were reviling and about to kill the Son, the Father was glorifying the Son through the dishonor of men (cf. John 12:27-33). The honor of God comes through humility. The truly great man is the servant of all (cf. Matt. 20:26-28). One day the Judge who judges righteously will assess things at their true value and will assign to men their true honor. On that day the one who has been the servant of all will be honored as the greatest of all.

In verse 51, Jesus makes one of His bold claims. If any man, not Jew only but *any* man, will keep His word, that man will not see death. The word *keep* in this verse comes from the Greek word *tereo* which means to obey. It is the same word that is translated *observe* in Matthew 28:20. Jesus means that those who keep His word shall never experience the *second* death which is eternal separation from God. Jesus means that for those who believe and obey Him, physical death is but the opening of the door to the life that is Life indeed. For the Christian, to be absent from the body means to be at home with the Lord (cf. II Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:21-23). But the Jews, either purposely or ignorantly, take Him literally—as meaning physical death.

To those listening to Jesus, His claim is the height of absurdity. The greatest Jew of them all, father Abraham, had died. Furthermore, the illustrious prophets had died (they seem to have forgotten Elijah's translation in the fiery chariot). All these great men were men of God and yet they had died. In their estimation He was indeed trying to glorify Himself and make Himself greater than Abraham or any of the prophets. Contemptuously they ask, "Whom makest thou thyself?"

When Jesus made His supernatural claims He was not bragging or seeking false glory; He was stating what was true! He knew the Father intimately and proved it by keeping the Father's word, doing the Father's works and manifesting the Father's nature to men. If, then, He should keep silent about His intimate relationship to Jehovah He would be a liar by His silent denial, just as these Jews were liars by their loud claims to know God while denying it by their lives. It is true of the "silent" Christian today, also—he lives a lie! Those who

believe and profess to follow Christ must confess that profession by word of mouth and by good deeds (cf. Matt. 5:13-16; 10:32-33; 12:30; 7:21-23; Mk. 8:38).

Now another astounding claim is made, this time on behalf of Abraham. Abraham rejoiced when he saw the day of Jesus. Of course, Jesus is contrasting the *faith* of Abraham with the *lack of faith* of these Jews who claim Abraham as their spiritual father. Here the Messiah stood before them and had done many mighty works in their very presence and they could not accept Him, yet their father Abraham had, by faith, seen the day of the Messiah. There were others, both before and after Abraham, who through eyes of faith beheld the day of Christ. Moses, it is written, "accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt . . . for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (cf. Heb. 11:26-27). The prophets also saw His day (cf. I Pet. 1:10-12).

Many of these Old Testament saints who saw the day of Christ through faith are named in Hebrews, the eleventh chapter. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). The key phrase is ". . . having greeted them from afar." Abraham rejoiced when Isaac was born for he knew that through Isaac (whose name means "laughter") would come the Messiah in whom God would bless all the nations (cf. Gal. 3:16). These Jews were not glad. Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted. They could not rejoice in a meek, gentle and spiritually-minded King. And so their boast to be the spiritual children of Abraham was hypocrisy.

These Jews have eyes but they see not, and ears but they hear not. They continue to interpret the Lord's words in a literal, physical sense. How could this Jesus of Nazareth, who is not fifty years of age, have seen Abraham who died over 2000 years before? Impossible!

In verse 58 Jesus states very plainly that although Abraham was born in point of time, He enjoyed timeless existence. Here is one of the many instances in the New Testament where the Greek language best expresses what Jesus intended to say. When Jesus says "I am," He means that He not only existed from all eternity before Abraham "became" a being in point of time, but Jesus transcends all time and will continue to exist eternally.

And when Jesus ascribed to Himself the words "I am," the scholars of the Law standing about would remember Exodus 3:14 wherein

God calls Himself "I AM THAT I AM." Of course, the Jews would look upon such a statement as blasphemy. According to their Law, blasphemy was punishable by being stoned to death (Lev. 24:16). But the Law also provided for the accused to have a trial with witnesses present to establish the charges. They knew that when challenged before they could not convict Him of sin, nor could they lawfully convict Him now, so they took up stones and fully intended to criminally assault Him as a mob. The temple even then was still under construction in some parts and there were stones lying around within easy reach (cf. our comments on John 2:20, Vol. I, page 84), and these Jews, enraged and maliciously seeking some excuse to murder Jesus, picked up stones to cast upon Him. Jesus, knowing that His time had not yet come for the supreme sacrifice, hid Himself amidst the crowd and went out of the temple.

Thus Jesus has met His enemies face to face in their own stronghold in Judea in the temple. He has made bold, supernatural claims for Himself and backed them up with His challenge that His enemies bring forth proof, if they can, of any sin or falsehood on His part. Not one shred of evidence or testimony is forthcoming—only slanderous insinuations. But the great controversies at the Feast of Tabernacles are not yet over. Jesus probably spends a few more days in the temple healing and teaching (cf. John 9:1—10:12) before He retires to Bethany and the home of Mary and Martha (cf. Luke 10:38 and Map #5, page 12).

Quiz

1. What are the connotations of Jesus being called "a Samaritan"?
2. How did Jesus answer their charge that He was demon-possessed?
3. Although Jesus never sought the glory of men, wherein did He obtain honor and glory?
4. Why was Jesus not boasting when He made His supernatural claims?
5. Who, besides Abraham, saw the day of Christ? Give Scripture references.
6. What two things did Jesus claim when He said "before Abraham was, I am"?
7. When does this particular period of teaching in the temple end?