

CHAPTER 8

In this chapter we have,

- I.** Christ's evading the snare which the Jews laid for him, in bringing to him a woman taken in adultery (v. 1-11).
- II.** Divers discourses or conferences of his with the Jews that cavilled at him, and sought occasion against him, and made every thing he said a matter of controversy.
 - 1.** Concerning his being the light of the world (v. 12-20).
 - 2.** Concerning the ruin of the unbelieving Jews (v. 21-30).
 - 3.** Concerning liberty and bondage (v. 31-37).
 - 4.** Concerning his Father and their father (v. 38-47).
 - 5.** Here is his discourse in answer to their blasphemous reproaches (v. 48-50).
 - 6.** Concerning the immortality of believers (v. 51-59). And in all this he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.

~~800~~ JOHN 8:1-11

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

Though Christ was basely abused in the foregoing chapter, both by the rulers and by the people, yet here we have him still at Jerusalem, still in the temple. *How often would he have gathered them!* Observe,

I. His retirement in the evening out of the town (v. 1): *He went unto the mount of olives*; whether to some friend's house, or to some booth pitched there, now at the feast of tabernacles, is not certain; whether he rested there, or, as some think, continued all night in prayer to God, we are not told. But he went out of Jerusalem, perhaps because he had no friend there that had either kindness or courage enough to give him a night's lodging; while his persecutors had *houses* of their own to go to (~~805~~ John 7:53), he could not so much as borrow a place to lay his head on, but what he must go a mile or two out of town for. He retired (as some think) because he would not expose himself to the peril of a popular tumult in the night. It is prudent to go out of the way of danger whenever we can do it without

going out of the way of duty. In the day-time, when he had work to do in the temple, he willingly exposed himself, and was under special protection, ³⁴⁰Isaiah 49:2. But in the night, when he had not work to do, he withdrew into the country, and sheltered himself there.

II. His return in the morning to the temple, and to his work there, v. 2. Observe,

1. What a diligent preacher Christ was: *Early in the morning he came again, and taught.* Though he had been teaching the day before, he taught again to-day. Christ was a constant preacher, in season and out of season. Three things were taken notice of here concerning Christ's preaching.

(1.) The time: *Early in the morning.* Though he lodged out of town, and perhaps had spent much of the night in secret prayer, yet he came *early*. When a day's work is to be done for God and souls it is good to begin betimes, and take the day before us.

(2.) The place: *In the temple;* not so much because it was a *consecrated* place (for then he would have chosen it at other times) as because it was now a *place of concourse;* and he would hereby countenance solemn assemblies for religious worship, and encourage people to come up to the temple, for he had not yet left it desolate.

(3.) His posture: *He sat down,* and taught, as one having authority, and as one that intended to abide by it for some time.

2. How diligently his preaching was attended upon: *All the people came unto him;* and perhaps many of them were the country-people, who were this day to return home from the feast, and were desirous to hear one sermon more from the mouth of Christ before they returned. They came to him, though he came early. They that *seek him early shall find him.* Though the rulers were displeased at those that came to hear him, yet they would come; and *he taught them,* though they were angry at *him* too. Though there were few or none among them that were persons of any figure, yet Christ bade them welcome, and taught them.

III. His dealing with those that brought to him the *woman taken in adultery, tempting him.* The scribes and Pharisees would not only not hear Christ patiently themselves, but they disturbed him when the people were attending on him. Observe here,

1. The case proposed to him by the scribes and Pharisees, who herein contrived to pick a quarrel with him, and bring him into a snare, v. 3-6.

(1.) They set the prisoner to the bar (v. 3): they brought him *a woman taken in adultery*, perhaps now lately taken, during the time of the feast of tabernacles, when, it may be, their dwelling in booths, and their feasting and joy, might, by wicked minds, which corrupt the best things, be made occasions of sin. Those that were *taken in adultery* were by the Jewish law to be put to death, which the Roman powers allowed them the execution of, and therefore she was brought before the ecclesiastical court. Observe, *She was taken in her adultery*. Though adultery is a work of darkness, which the criminals commonly take all the care they can to conceal, yet sometimes it is strangely brought to light. Those that promise themselves secrecy in sin deceive themselves. The scribes and Pharisees bring her to Christ, and set her in the midst of the assembly, as if they would leave her wholly to the judgment of Christ, he having *sat down*, as a judge upon the bench.

(2.) They prefer an indictment against her: *Master, this woman was taken in adultery*, v. 4. Here they call him *Master* whom but the day before they had called a *deceiver*, in hopes with their flatteries to have ensnared him, as those, ^{<121>}Luke 20:20. But, though men may be imposed upon with compliments, he that searches the heart cannot.

[1.] The crime for which the prisoner stands indicted is no less than adultery, which even in the patriarchal age, before the law of Moses, was looked upon as *an iniquity to be punished by the judges*, ^{<89>}Job 31:9-11; ^{<134>}Genesis 38:24. The Pharisees, by their vigorous prosecution of this offender, seemed to have a great zeal against the sin, when it appeared afterwards that they themselves were not free from it; nay, they were within *full of all uncleanness*, ^{<127>}Matthew 23:27, 28. Note, It is common for those that are indulgent to their own sin to be severe against the sins of others.

[2.] The proof of the crime was from the notorious evidence of the fact, an incontestable proof; she was *taken in the act*, so that there was no room left to plead not guilty. Had she not been taken in this act, she might have gone on to another, till her heart had been perfectly hardened; but sometimes it proves a mercy to sinners to have their sin brought to light, that they may *do no more presumptuously*. Better our sin should *shame* us

than *damn* us, and be set in order before us for our conviction than for our condemnation.

(3.) They produce the statute in this case made and provided, and upon which she was indicted, v. 5. Moses in the law commanded *that such should be stoned*. Moses commanded that they should be *put to death* (~~Leviticus~~ Leviticus 20:10; ~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 22:22), but not that they should be stoned, unless the adulteress was espoused, not married, or was a priest's daughter, ~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 22:21. Note, Adultery is an exceedingly sinful sin, for it is the rebellion of a vile lust, not only against the command, but against the covenant, of our God. It is the violation of a divine institution in innocency, by the indulgence of one of the basest lusts of man in his degeneracy.

(4.) They pray his judgment in the case: "*But what sayest thou, who pretendest to be a teacher come from God to repeal old laws and enact new ones? What hast thou to say in this case?*" If they had asked this question in sincerity, with a humble desire to know his mind, it had been very commendable. Those that are entrusted with the administration of justice should look up to Christ for direction; but *this they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him*, v. 6.

[1.] If he should confirm the sentence of the law, and let it take its course, they would censure him as inconsistent with himself (he having received publicans and harlots) and with the character of the Messiah, who should be meek, and have salvation, and proclaim a year of release; and perhaps they would accuse him to the Roman governor, for countenancing the Jews in the exercise of a judicial power. But,

[2.] If he should acquit her, and give his opinion that the sentence should not be executed (as they expected he would), they would represent him, *First*, As an enemy to the law of Moses, and as one that usurped an authority to correct and control it, and would confirm that prejudice against him which his enemies were so industrious to propagate, that he came to *destroy the law and the prophets*. *Secondly*, As a friend to sinners, and, consequently, a favourer of sin; if he should seem to connive at such wickedness, and let it go unpunished, they would represent him as countenancing it, and being a patron of offences, if he was a protector of offenders, than which no reflection could be more invidious upon one that professed the strictness, purity, and business of a prophet.

2. The method he took to resolve this case, and so to break this snare.

(1.) He seemed to slight it, and turned a deaf ear to it: He *stooped down, and wrote on the ground*. It is impossible to tell, and therefore needless to ask, what he wrote; but this is the only mention made in the gospels of Christ's writing. Eusebius indeed speaks of his writing to Abgarus, king of Edessa. Some think they have a liberty of conjecture as to what he wrote here. Grotius says, It was some grave weighty saying, and that it was usual for wise men, when they were very thoughtful concerning any thing, to do so. Jerome and Ambrose suppose he wrote, *Let the names of these wicked men be written in the dust*. Others this, *The earth accuses the earth, but the judgment is mine*. Christ by this teaches us to be slow to speak when difficult cases are proposed to us, not quickly to shoot our bolt; and when provocations are given us, or we are bantered, to pause and consider before we reply; think twice before we speak once: *The heart of the wise studies to answer*. Our translation from some Greek copies, which add, *me prospoioumenos* (though most copies have it not), give this account of the reason of his writing on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. He did as it were look another way, to show that he was not willing to take notice of their address, saying, in effect, *Who made me a judge or a divider?* It is safe in many cases to be deaf to that which it is not safe to answer, ~~CHR~~ Psalm 38:13. Christ would not have his ministers to be entangled in secular affairs. Let them rather employ themselves in any lawful studies, and fill up their time in writing on the ground (which nobody will heed), than busy themselves in that which does not belong to them. But, when Christ seemed as though he heard them not, he made it appear that he not only heard their words, but knew their thoughts.

(2.) When they importunately, or rather impertinently, pressed him for an answer, he turned the conviction of the prisoner upon the prosecutors, v. 7.

[1.] They *continued asking him*, and his seeming not to take notice of them made them the more vehement; for now they thought sure enough that they had run him aground, and that he could not avoid the imputation of contradicting either the law of Moses, if he should acquit the prisoner, or his own doctrine of mercy and pardon, if he should condemn her; and therefore they pushed on their appeal to him with vigour; whereas they should have construed his disregard of them as a check to their design, and an intimation to them to desist, as they tendered their own reputation.

[2.] At last he put them all to shame and silence with one word: *He lifted up himself*, awaking as one out of sleep (^{<BIB>}Psalm 78:65), and *said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*

First, Here Christ avoided the snare which they had laid for him, and effectually saved his own reputation. He neither reflected upon the law nor excused the prisoner's guilt, nor did he on the other hand encourage the prosecution or countenance their heat; see the good effect of consideration. When we cannot make our point by steering a direct course, it is good to fetch a compass.

Secondly, *In the net which they spread is their own foot taken.* They came with design to accuse him, but they were forced to accuse themselves. Christ owns it was fit the prisoner should be prosecuted, but appeals to their consciences whether they were fit to be the prosecutors.

a. He here refers to that rule which the law of Moses prescribed in the execution of criminals, that the *hand of the witnesses must be first upon them* (^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 17:7), as in the stoning of Stephen, ^{<BIB>}Acts 7:58. The scribes and Pharisees were the witnesses against this woman. Now Christ puts it to them whether, according to their own law, they would dare to be the executioners. Durst they take away that life with their hands which they were now taking away with their tongues? would not their own consciences fly in their faces if they did?

b. He builds upon an uncontested maxim in morality, that it is very absurd for men to be zealous in punishing the offences of others, while they are every whit as guilty themselves, and they are not better than self-condemned who judge others, and yet themselves do the same thing: "If there be any of you who is *without sin*, without sin of this nature, that has not some time or other been guilty of fornication or adultery, let him cast the first stone at her." Not that magistrates, who are conscious of guilt themselves, should therefore connive at others' guilt. But therefore,

(a.) Whenever we find fault with others, we ought to reflect upon ourselves, and to be more severe against sin in ourselves than in others.

(b.) We ought to be favourable, though not to the sins, yet to the persons, of those that offend, and to restore them with a *spirit of meekness*, considering ourselves and our own corrupt nature. *Aut*

sumus, aut fuimus, vel possumus esse quod hic est — We either are, or have been, or may be, what he is. Let this restrain us from *throwing stones* at our brethren, and proclaiming their faults. *Let him that is without sin* begin such discourse as this, and then those that are truly humbled for their own sins will blush at it, and be glad to *let it drop*.

(c.) Those that are any way obliged to animadvert upon the faults of others are concerned to look well to themselves, and keep themselves pure (^{<405>}Matthew 7:5), *Qui alterum incusat probri, ipsum se intueri oportet*. The snuffers of the tabernacle were of *pure gold*.

c. Perhaps he refers to the trial of the suspected wife by the jealous husband with the waters of jealousy. The man was to bring her to the priest (^{<405>}Numbers 5:15), as the scribes and Pharisees brought this woman to Christ. Now it was a received opinion among the Jews, and confirmed by experience, that if the husband who brought his wife to that trial had himself been at any time guilty of adultery, *Aquae non explorant ejus uxorem* — *The bitter water had no effect upon the wife*. “Come then,” saith Christ, “according to your own tradition will I judge you; if you are without sin, stand to the charge, and let the adulteress be executed; but if not, though she be guilty, while you that present her are equally so, according to your own rule she shall be free.”

d. In this he attended to the great work which he came into the world about, and that was to bring sinners to repentance; not to destroy, but to save. He aimed to bring, not only the prisoner to repentance, by showing her his mercy, but the prosecutors too, by showing them their sins. They sought to ensnare him; he sought to convince and convert them. Thus *the blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul*.

[3.] Having given them this startling word, he left them to consider of it, *and again stooped down, and wrote on the ground*, v. 8. As when they made their address he seemed to slight their question, so now that he had given them an answer he slighted their resentment of it, not caring what they said to it; nay, they needed not to make any reply; the matter was lodged in their own breasts, let them make the best of it there. Or, he would not seem to wait for an answer, lest they should on a sudden justify themselves, and then think themselves bound in honour to persist in it; but gives them time to pause, and to commune with their own hearts. God saith, *I hearkened and heard*, (^{<406>}Jeremiah 8:6. Some Greek copies here read, *He wrote on the ground, enos hekastou auton tas hamartias* — the

sins of every one of them; this he could do, for he *sets our iniquities before him*; and this he will do, for he will *set them in order* before us too; he *seals up our transgressions*, ^{<S417>}Job 14:17. But he does not write men's sins *in the sand*; no, they are written as with a *pen of iron* and the *point of a diamond* (^{<S417E>}Jeremiah 17:1), never to be forgotten till they are forgiven.

[4.] The scribes and Pharisees were so strangely thunderstruck with the words of Christ that they let fall their persecution of Christ, whom they durst no further tempt, and their prosecution of the woman, whom they durst no longer accuse (v. 9): *They went out one by one*.

First, Perhaps his writing on the ground frightened them, as the hand-writing on the wall frightened Belshazzar. They concluded he was writing bitter things against them, writing their doom. Happy they who have no reason to be afraid of Christ's writing!

Secondly, What he said frightened them by sending them to their own consciences; he had *shown them to themselves*, and they were afraid if they should stay till he lifted up himself again his next word would show them to the world, and shame them before men, and therefore they thought it best to withdraw. They went out *one by one*, that they might go out *softly*, and not by a noisy flight disturb Christ; they went away by *stealth*, as *people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle*, ^{<S418>}2 Samuel 19:3. The order of their departure is taken notice of, *beginning at the eldest*, either because they were most guilty, or first aware of the danger they were in of being put to the blush; and if the eldest quit the field, and retreat ingloriously, no marvel if the younger follow them. Now see here,

1. The *force* of the word of Christ for the conviction of sinners: *They who heard it were convicted by their own consciences*. Conscience is God's deputy in the soul, and one word from him will set it on work, ^{<S418E>}Hebrews 4:12. Those that had been old in adulteries, and long fixed in a proud opinion of themselves, were here, even the oldest of them, startled by the word of Christ; even scribes and Pharisees, who were most conceited of themselves, are by the power of Christ's word made to retire with shame.

2. The *folly* of sinners under these convictions, which appears in these scribes and Pharisees.

(1.) It is folly for those that are under convictions to make it their principal care to *avoid shame*, as Judah (⁴¹⁸³Genesis 38:23), *lest we be shamed*. Our care should be more to save our souls than to save our credit. Saul evidenced his hypocrisy when he said, *I have sinned, yet now honour me, I pray thee*. There is no way to get the honour and comfort of penitents, but by taking the shame of penitents.

(2.) It is folly for those that are under convictions to contrive how to *shift off* their convictions, and to get rid of them. The scribes and Pharisees had the wound *opened*, and now they should have been desirous to have it *searched*, and then it might have been *healed*, but this was the thing they *dreaded* and *declined*.

(3.) It is folly for those that are under convictions to *get away from Jesus Christ*, as these here did, for he is the only one that can heal the wounds of conscience, and speak peace to us. Those that are convicted by their consciences will be condemned by their Judge, if they be not justified by their Redeemer; and will they then go from him? To whom will they go?

[5.] When the *self-conceited* prosecutors quitted the field, and *fled for the same*, the *self-condemned* prisoner stood her ground, with a resolution to abide by the judgment of our Lord Jesus: *Jesus was left alone* from the company of the scribes and Pharisees, free from their molestations, *and the woman standing in the midst* of the assembly that were attending on Christ's preaching, where they set her, v. 3. She did not seek to make her escape, though she had opportunity for it; but her prosecutors had appealed unto Jesus, and to him she would go, on him she would wait for her doom. Note, Those whose cause is brought before our Lord Jesus will never have occasion to remove it into any other court, for he is the refuge of penitents. The law which accuses us, and calls for judgment against us, is by the gospel of Christ made to withdraw; its demands are answered, and its clamours silenced, by the blood of Jesus. Our cause is lodged in the gospel court; we are *left with Jesus alone*, it is with him only that we have now to deal, for to him all judgment is committed; let us therefore secure our interest in him, and we are made for ever. Let his gospel *rule us*, and it will infallibly *save us*.

[6.] Here is the conclusion of the trial, and the issue it was brought to: *Jesus lifted up himself, and he saw none but the woman*, v. 10, 11. Though Christ may seem to take no notice of what is said and done, but leave it to

the *contending* sons of men to *deal it out among themselves*, yet, when the hour of his judgment is come, he will no longer keep silence. When David had appealed to God, he prayed, *Lift up thyself*, ⁴⁰⁶Psalm 7:6, and 94:2. The woman, it is likely, stood trembling at the bar, as one doubtful of the issue. Christ was *without sin*, and might cast the first stone; but though none more severe than he against sin, for he is infinitely just and holy, none more compassionate than he to sinners, for he is infinitely gracious and merciful, and this poor malefactor finds him so, now that she *stands upon her deliverance*. Here is the method of courts of judicature observed.

First, The prosecutors are called: *Where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?* Not but that Christ knew where they were; but he asked, that he might shame them, who declined his judgment, and encourage her who resolved to abide by it. St. Paul's challenge is like this, *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* Where are those their accusers? The *accuser of the brethren shall be fairly cast out*, and all indictments legally and regularly quashed.

Secondly, They do not appear when the question is asked: *Hath no man condemned thee?* She said, *No man, Lord*. She speaks respectfully to Christ, calls him *Lord*, but is silent concerning her prosecutors, says nothing in answer to that question which concerned them, *Where are those thine accusers?* She does not triumph in their retreat nor insult over them as witnesses against themselves, not against her. If we hope to be forgiven by our Judge, we must forgive our accusers; and if their accusations, how invidious soever, were the happy occasion of awakening our consciences, we may easily *forgive them this wrong*. But she answered the question which concerned herself, *Has no man condemned thee?* True penitents find it enough to give an account of themselves to God, and will not undertake to give an account of other people.

Thirdly, The prisoner is therefore discharged: *Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more*. Consider this,

a. As her discharge from the temporal punishment: "If they do not condemn thee to be *stoned to death*, neither *do I*." Not that Christ came to disarm the magistrate of his sword of justice, nor that it is his will that capital punishments should not be inflicted on malefactors; so far from this, the administration of public justice is established by the gospel, and made subservient to Christ's kingdom: *By me kings reign*. But Christ would not condemn this woman,

(a.) Because it was *none of his business*; he was no judge nor divider, and therefore would not intermeddle in secular affairs. His *kingdom* was *not of this world*. *Tractent fabrilia fabri* — *Let every one act in his own province*.

(b.) Because she was prosecuted by those that were more guilty than she and could not for shame insist upon their demand of justice against her. The law appointed the hands of the witnesses to be first upon the criminal, and afterwards the hands of all the people, so that if they fly off, and do not condemn her, the prosecution drops. The justice of God, in inflicting temporal judgments, sometimes takes notice of a *comparative righteousness*, and spares those who are otherwise obnoxious when the punishing of them would gratify those that are worse than they, ^{<622>}Deuteronomy 32:26, 27. But, when Christ dismissed her, it was with this caution, *Go, and sin no more*. Impunity emboldens malefactors, and therefore those who are guilty, and yet have found means to escape the edge of the law, need to double their watch, *lest Satan get advantage*; for the fairer the escape was, the fairer the warning was to go and sin no more. Those who help to save the life of a criminal should, as Christ here, help to save the soul with this caution.

b. As her discharge from the eternal punishment. For Christ to say, *I do not condemn thee* is, in effect, to say, *I do forgive thee*; and the *Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins*, and could upon good grounds give this absolution; for as he knew the hardness and impenitent hearts of the prosecutors, and therefore said that which would confound them, so he knew the tenderness and sincere repentance of the prisoner, and therefore said that which would comfort her, as he did to that woman who was a sinner, such a sinner as this, who was likewise looked upon with disdain by a Pharisee (^{<478>}Luke 7:48, 50): *Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace*. So here, *Neither do I condemn thee*. Note,

(a.) Those are truly happy whom Christ *doth not condemn*, for his discharge is a sufficient answer to all other challenges; they are all *coram non iudice* — *before an unauthorized judge*.

(b.) Christ will not condemn those who, though they have sinned, will *go and sin no more*, ^{<488>}Psalms 85:8; ^{<2817>}Isaiah 55:7. he will not take the advantage he has against us for our former rebellions, if we will but lay down our arms and return to our allegiance.

(c.) Christ's favour to us in the remission of the sins that are past should be a prevailing argument with us to *go and sin no more*, ~~481~~Romans 6:1, 2. Will not Christ condemn thee? Go then and sin no more.

~~482~~ JOHN 8:12-20

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

The rest of the chapter is taken up with debates between Christ and contradicting sinners, who cavilled at the most gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. It is not certain whether these disputes were the same day that the adulteress was discharged; it is probable they were, for the evangelist mentions no other day, and takes notice (v. 2) how early Christ began that day's work. Though those Pharisees that accused the woman had absconded, yet there were other Pharisees (v. 13) to confront Christ, who had brass enough in their foreheads to keep them in countenance, though some of their party were put to such a shameful retreat; nay perhaps that made them the more industrious to pick quarrels with him, to retrieve, if possible, the reputation of their baffled party. In these verses we have,

I. A great doctrine laid down, with the application of it.

1. The doctrine is, *That Christ is the light of the world* (v. 12): *Then spoke Jesus again unto them*; though he had spoken a great deal to them to little purpose, and what he had said was opposed, yet he *spoke again*, for he *speaketh once, yea, twice*. They had turned a deaf ear to what he said, and yet he *spoke again to them*, saying, *I am the light of the world*. Note, Jesus Christ is the light of the world. One of the rabbies saith, *Light is the name of the Messiah*, as it is written, ~~483~~Daniel 2:22, *And light dwelleth with him*. God is light, and Christ is *the image of the invisible God*; God of gods, Light of lights. He was expected to be a *light to enlighten the Gentiles* (~~484~~Luke 2:32), and so the *light of the world*, and not of the Jewish church only. The visible light of the world is the sun, and Christ is the *Sun of righteousness*. One sun enlightens the whole world, so does one Christ, and there needs no more. Christ in calling himself the light expresses,

(1.) What he is in himself — most excellent and glorious.

(2.) What he is to the world — the fountain of light, enlightening every man. What a dungeon would the world be without the sun! So would it be without Christ by whom *light came into the world*, ~~John~~ John 3:19.

2. The inference from this doctrine is, *He that followeth me*, as a traveller follows the light in a dark night, *shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. If Christ be the light, then,

(1.) It is our duty to *follow him*, to submit ourselves to his guidance, and in every thing take directions from him, in the way that leads to happiness. Many follow *false lights* — *ignes fatui*, that lead them to destruction; but Christ is the *true light*. It is not enough to *look at* this light, and to *gaze* upon it, but we must follow it, believe in it, and walk in it, for it is a light to *our feet*, not *our eyes* only.

(2.) It is the happiness of those who follow Christ that they *shall not walk in darkness*. They shall not be left destitute of those instructions in the way of truth which are necessary to keep them from destroying error, and those directions in the way of duty which are necessary to keep them from damning sin. They shall have the *light of life*, that knowledge and enjoyment of God which will be to them the light of spiritual life in this world and of everlasting life in the other world, where there will be no death nor darkness. Follow Christ, and we shall undoubtedly be happy in both worlds. Follow Christ, and we shall follow him to heaven.

II. The objection which the Pharisees made against this doctrine, and it was very trifling and frivolous: *Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true*, v. 13. In this objection they went upon the suspicion which we commonly have of men's self-condemnation, which is concluded to be the native language of self-love, such as we are all ready to condemn in others, but few are willing to own in themselves. But in this case the objection was very unjust, for,

1. They made that his crime, and a diminution to the credibility of his doctrine, which in the case of one who introduced a divine revelation was necessary and unavoidable. Did not Moses and all the prophets bear witness of themselves when they avouched themselves to be God's messengers? Did not the Pharisees ask John Baptist, *What sayest thou of thyself?*

2. They overlooked the testimony of all the other witnesses, which corroborated the testimony he bore of himself. Had he only borne record of himself, his testimony had indeed been *suspicious*, and the belief of it might have been *suspended*; but his doctrine was attested by more than *two or three credible witnesses*, enough to *establish every word* of it.

III. Christ's reply to this objection, v. 14. He does not retort upon them as he might (“You profess yourselves to be devout and good men, but your witness is not *true*”), but plainly vindicates himself; and, though he had waived his own testimony (^{<465>}John 5:31), yet here he abides by it, that it did not derogate from the credibility of his other proofs, but was necessary to show the force of them. He is the light of the world, and it is the property of light to be self-evidencing. First principles prove themselves. He urges three things to prove that his testimony, though of himself, was true and cogent.

1. That he was conscious to himself of his own authority, and abundantly satisfied in himself concerning it. He did not speak as one at uncertainty, nor propose a disputable notion, about which he himself hesitated, but *declared a decree*, and gave such an account of himself as he would *abide by*: *I know whence I came, and whither I go*. He was fully apprised of his own undertaking from first to last; knew whose errand he went upon, and what his success would be. He knew what he *was* before his manifestation to the world, and what he *should be* after; that he came *from the Father*, and was going *to him* (^{<465>}John 16:28), came *from glory*, and was going *to glory*, (^{<475>}John 17:5). This is the satisfaction of all good Christians, that though the world know them not, as it knew him not, yet they know whence their spiritual life comes, and whither it tends, and go upon sure grounds.

2. That they are very incompetent judges of him, and of his doctrine, and not to be regarded.

(1.) Because they were *ignorant*, willingly and resolvedly *ignorant*: *You cannot tell whence I came, and whither I go*. To what purpose is it to talk with those who know nothing of the matter, nor desire to know? He had told them of his coming from heaven and returning to heaven, but it was *foolishness to them*, they *received it not*; it was what the *brutish man knows not*, ^{<496>}Psalms 92:6. They took upon them to judge of that which they did not understand, which lay quite out of the road of their

acquaintance. Those that despise Christ's dominions and dignities speak evil of what they *know not*, Jude, v. 8, 10.

(2.) Because they were *partial* (v. 15): *You judge after the flesh*. When fleshly wisdom gives the rule of judgment, and outward appearances only are given in evidence, and the case decided according to them, then men *judge after the flesh*; and when the consideration of a secular interest turns the scale in judging of spiritual matters, when we judge in favour of that which pleases the carnal mind, and recommends us to a carnal world, we judge after the flesh; and the judgment cannot be right when the rule is wrong. The Jews judged of Christ and his gospel by outward appearances, and, because he appeared so mean, thought it impossible he should be the light of the world; as if the sun under a cloud were no sun.

(3.) Because they were *unjust* and *unfair* towards him, intimated in this: “*I judge no man*; I neither make nor meddle with your political affairs, nor does my doctrine or practice at all intrench upon, or interfere with, your civil rights or secular powers.” He thus *judged no man*. Now, if he did not *war after the flesh*, it was very unreasonable for them to *judge him after the flesh*, and to treat him as an offender against the civil government. Or, “*I judge no man*,” that is, “not now in my first coming, that is deferred till I come again,” John 3:17. *Prima dispensatio Christi medicinalis est, non judicialis* — *The first coming of Christ was for the purpose of administering, not justice, but medicine.*

3. That his testimony of himself was sufficiently supported and corroborated by the testimony of his Father *with him and for him* (v. 16): *And yet, if I judge, my judgment is true*. He did in his doctrine judge (John 9:39), though not *politically*. Consider him then,

(1.) As a judge, and his own judgment was valid: “*If I judge*, I who have authority to execute judgments, I to whom all things are delivered, I who am the Son of God, and have the Spirit of God, if I judge, *my judgment is true*, of incontestable rectitude and uncontrollable authority, Romans 2:2. *If I should judge*, my judgment must be true, and then you would be condemned; but the judgment-day is not yet come, you are not yet to be condemned, but spared, and therefore now *I judge no man*,” so Chrysostom. Now that which makes his judgment unexceptionable is,

[1.] His Father's concurrence with him: *I am not alone, but I and the Father*. He has the Father's concurring *counsels* to *direct*; as he was with

the Father before the world in forming the counsels, so the Father was with him in the world in prosecuting and executing those counsels, and never left him *inops consilii* — *without advice*, ^{<2810>}Isaiah 11:2. All the *counsels of peace* (and of war too) *were between them both*, ^{<3063>}Zechariah 6:13. He had also the Father's concurring power to authorize and confirm what he did; see ^{<4920>}Psalms 89:21, etc.; ^{<2811>}Isaiah 42:1. He did not act *separately*, but in his own name and his Father's, and *by the authority aforesaid*, ^{<4857>}John 5:17, and 14:9, 10.

[2.] His Father's commission to him: “It is the Father that *sent me*.” Note, God will go along with those that he sends; see ^{<4880>}Exodus 3:10, 12: *Come, and I will send thee, and certainly I will be with thee*. Now, if Christ had a *commission* from the Father, and the Father's *presence* with him in all his administrations, no doubt his *judgment* was *true* and valid; no exception lay *against* it, no appeal lay *from* it.

(2.) Look upon him as *a witness*, and now he appeared no otherwise (having not as yet taken the throne of judgment), and as such his testimony was true and unexceptionable; this he shows, v. 17, 18, where,

[1.] He quotes a maxim of the Jewish law, v. 17. That *the testimony of two men is true*. Not as if it were always true *in itself*, for many a time hand has been joined in hand to bear a *false* testimony, ^{<4121>}1 Kings 21:10. But it is allowed as sufficient evidence upon which to ground a verdict (*verum dictum*), and if nothing appear to the contrary it is taken for granted to be *true*. Reference is here had to that law (^{<4876>}Deuteronomy 17:6), *At the mouth of two witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death*. And see ^{<4895>}Deuteronomy 9:15; ^{<4653>}Numbers 35:30. It was in *favour of life* that in capital cases two witnesses were required, as with us in case of treason. See ^{<3868>}Hebrews 6:18.

[2.] He applies this to the case in hand (v. 18): *I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness of me*. Behold two witnesses! Though in human courts, where two witnesses are required, the criminal or candidate is not admitted to be a witness for himself; yet in a matter purely divine, which can be proved only by a divine testimony, and God himself must be the witness, if the formality of two or three witnesses be insisted on, there can be no other than the eternal Father, the eternal Son of the Father, and the eternal Spirit. Now if the testimony of two distinct persons, that are *men*, and therefore may deceive or be deceived, is conclusive, much more ought the testimony of the Son of God concerning

himself, backed with the testimony of his Father concerning him, to command assent; see ^{GRF}1 John 5:7, 9-11. Now this proves not only that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons (for their respective testimonies are here spoken of as the testimonies of two several persons), but that these two are one, not only one in their testimony, but equal in power and glory, and therefore the same in substance. St. Austin here takes occasion to caution his hearers against Sabellianism on the one hand, which confounded the persons in the Godhead, and Arianism on the other, which denied the Godhead of the Son and Spirit. *Alius est filius, et alius pater, non tamed aliud, sed hoc ipsum est et pater, et filius, scilicet unus Deus est* — *The Son is one Person, and the Father is another; they do not, however, constitute two Beings, but the Father is the same Being that the Son is, that is, the only true God.* Tract. 36, in Joann. Christ here speaks of himself and the Father as witnesses to the world, giving in evidence to the reason and conscience of the children of men, whom he deals with as men. And these witnesses to the world now will in the great day be witnesses against those that persist in unbelief, and *their* word will judge men.

This was the sum of the first conference between Christ and these carnal Jews, in the conclusion of which we are told how their tongues were let loose, and their hands tied.

First, How their tongues were let loose (such was the malice of hell) to cavil at his discourse, v. 19. Though in what he said there appeared nothing of human policy or artifice, but a divine security, yet they set themselves to *cross questions* with him. None so incurably *blind* as those that resolve they *will not see*. Observe,

a. How they evaded the *conviction* with a *cavil*: *Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father?* They might easily have understood, by the tenour of this and his other discourses, that when he spoke of his *Father* he meant no other than God himself; yet they pretend to understand him of a common person, and, since he appeals to his testimony, they bid him *call his witness*, and challenge him, if he can, to produce him: *Where is thy Father?* Thus, as Christ said of them (v. 15), they *judge after the flesh*. Perhaps they hereby intend a reflection upon the meanness and obscurity of his family: *Where is thy Father*, that he should be fit to give evidence in such a case as this? Thus they turned it off with a taunt, when they *could not resist the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke*.

b. How he evaded the *cavil* with a further *conviction*; he did not tell them where his Father was, but charged them with wilful ignorance: “*You neither know me nor my Father.* It is to no purpose to discourse to you about divine things, who talk of them as blind men do of colours. Poor creatures! you know nothing of the matter.”

(a.) He charges them with ignorance of God: “*You know not my Father.*” In Judah was God known (~~1561~~ Psalm 76:1); they had some knowledge of him as the God that made the world, but their eyes were darkened that they could not see the light of his glory shining *in the face of Jesus Christ.* The *little children* of the Christian church *know the Father,* know him as a Father (~~611~~ 1 John 2:13); but these rulers of the Jews did not, because they would not so know him.

(b.) He shows them the true cause of their ignorance of God: *If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.* The reason why men are ignorant of God is because they are unacquainted with Jesus Christ. Did we know Christ,

[a.] In knowing him we should know the Father, of whose person he is the express image, ~~649~~ John 14:9. Chrysostom proves hence the Godhead of Christ, and his equality with his Father. We cannot say, “He that knows a man knows an angel,” or, “He that knows a creature knows the Creator;” but he that knows Christ knows the Father.

[b.] By him we should be instructed in the knowledge of God, and introduced into an acquaintance with him. If we *knew Christ* better, we should *know the Father* better; but, where the Christian religion is slighted and opposed, natural religion will soon be lost and laid aside. Deism makes way for atheism. Those become vain in their imaginations concerning God that will not learn of Christ.

Secondly, See how their hands were tied, though their tongues were thus let loose; such was the power of Heaven to restrain the malice of hell. *These words spoke Jesus,* these bold words, these words of conviction and reproof, *in the treasury,* an apartment of the temple, where, to be sure, the chief priests, whose gain was their godliness, were mostly resident, attending the business of the revenue. Christ *taught in the temple,* sometimes in one part, sometimes in another, as he saw occasion. Now the priests who had so great a concern in the temple, and looked upon it as their *demesne,* might easily, with the assistance of the janizaries that were

at their beck, either have seized him and exposed him to the rage of the mob, and that punishment which they called the *beating of the rebels*; or, at least, have *silenced* him, and stopped his mouth there, as Amos, though tolerated in the land of Judah, was forbidden to prophesy in the king's chapel, Amos, 7:12, 13. Yet even *in the temple*, where they had him in their reach, *no man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come*. See here,

1. The restraint laid upon his persecutors by an invisible power; none of them durst meddle with him. God can set bounds to the wrath of men, as he does to the waves of the sea. Let us not therefore fear danger in the way of duty; for God hath Satan and all his instruments in a chain.

2. The reason of this restraint: *His hour was not yet come*. The frequent mention of this intimates how much the time of our departure out of the world depends upon the fixed counsel and decree of God. It *will* come, it is coming; not yet come, but it is at hand. Our enemies cannot hasten it any sooner, nor our friends delay it any longer, than the time appointed of the Father, which is very comfortable to every good man, who can look up and say with pleasure, *My times are in thy hands*; and better there than in our own. His hour was not yet come, because his work was not done, nor his testimony finished. To all God's purposes *there is a time*.

✠ JOHN 8:21-30

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

Christ here gives fair warning to the careless unbelieving Jews to consider what would be the consequence of their infidelity, that they might prevent it before it was too late; for he spoke words of terror as well as words of grace. Observe here,

I. The wrath threatened (v. 21): *Jesus said again unto them* that which might be likely to do them good. He continued to teach, in kindness to those few who received his doctrine, though there were many that resisted it, which is an example to ministers to go on with their work, notwithstanding opposition, because a remnant shall be saved. Here Christ

changes his voice; he had *pip'd to them* in the offers of his grace, and they *had not danced*; now he mourns to them in the denunciations of his wrath, to try if they would lament. He said, *I go my way, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Whither I go you cannot come.* Every word is terrible, and bespeaks spiritual judgments, which are the sorest of all judgments; worse than war, pestilence, and captivity, which the Old-Testament prophets denounced. Four things are here threatened against the Jews.

1. Christ's departure from them: *I go my way*, that is, "It shall not be long before I go; you need not take so much pains to drive me from you, I shall go of myself." They said to him, *Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*; and he takes them at their word; but woe to those from whom Christ departs. Ichabod, the glory is gone, our defence is departed, when Christ goes. Christ frequently warned them of his departure before he left them: he *bade often farewell*, as one *loth to depart*, and willing to be invited, and that would have them *stir up themselves to take hold on him*.

2. Their enmity to the true Messiah, and their fruitless and infatuated enquiries after another Messiah when he was gone away, which were both their sin and their punishment: *You shall seek me*, which intimates either,

(1.) Their *enmity to the true Christ*: "You shall seek to ruin my interest, by persecuting my doctrine and followers, with a fruitless design to root them out." This was a continual vexation and torment to themselves, made them incurably *ill-natured*, and brought *wrath upon them* (God's and their own) *to the uttermost*. Or,

(2.) Their *enquiries after false Christs*: "You shall continue your expectations of the Messiah, and be the self-perplexing seekers of a Christ to come, when he is already come;" like the Sodomites, who, being struck with blindness, wearied themselves to find the door. See ~~481~~ Romans 9:31, 32.

3. Their final impenitency: *You shall die in your sins*. Here is an error in all our English Bibles, even the old bishops' translation, and that of Geneva (the Rhemists only excepted), for all the Greek copies have it in the singular number, *en te hamartia hymon* — *in your sin*, so all the Latin versions; and Calvin has a note upon the difference between this and v. 24, where it is plural, *tais hamartiais*, that here it is meant especially of the sin

of unbelief, *in hoc peccato vestro* — *in this sin of yours*. Note, Those that live in unbelief are for ever undone if they die in unbelief. Or, it may be understood in general, *You shall die in your iniquity*, as ^{<3189>}Ezekiel 3:19, and 33:9. Many that have long lived in sin are, through grace, saved by a timely repentance from *dying in sin*; but for those who go out of this world of probation into that of retribution under the guilt of sin unpardoned, and the power of sin unbroken, there remaineth no relief: salvation itself cannot save them, ^{<3211>}Job 20:11; ^{<3527>}Ezekiel 32:27.

4. Their eternal separation from Christ and all happiness in him: *Whither I go you cannot come*. When Christ left the world, he went to a state of perfect happiness; he went to paradise. Thither he took the penitent thief with him, that did not die in his sins; but the impenitent not only *shall not* come to him, but they *cannot*; it is morally impossible, for heaven would not be heaven to those that die unsanctified and unmeet for it. You cannot come, because you have *no right* to enter into that Jerusalem, ^{<624>}Revelation 22:14. *Whither I go you cannot come*, to fetch me thence, so Dr. Whitby; and the same is the comfort of all good Christians, that, when they get to heaven, they will be out of the reach of their enemies' malice.

II. The jest they made of this threatening. Instead of trembling at this word, they bantered it, and turned it into ridicule (v. 22): *Will he kill himself?* See here,

1. What slight thoughts they had of Christ's threatenings; they could make themselves and one another merry with them, as those that mocked the messengers of the Lord, and turned the *burden of the word of the Lord* into a *by-word*, and *precept upon precept, line upon line*, into a merry song, ^{<3283>}Isaiah 28:13. *But be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong*.

2. What ill thoughts they had of Christ's meaning, as if he had an inhuman design upon his own life, to avoid the indignities done him, like Saul. This is indeed (say they) to go whither we cannot follow him, for we will never *kill ourselves*. Thus they make him not only such a one as themselves, but worse; yet in the calamities brought by the Romans upon the Jews many of them in discontent and despair did kill themselves. They had put a much more favourable construction upon this word of his (^{<4173>}John 7:34, 35): *Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles?* But see how indulged malice grows more and more malicious.

III. The confirmation of what he had said.

1. He had said, *Whither I go you cannot come*, and here he gives the reason for this (v. 23): *You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.* You are *ek ton kato* — *of those things which are beneath*; noting, not so much their rise from beneath as their affection to these lower things: “You are *in with these things*, as those that belong to them; how can you come where I go, when your spirit and disposition are so directly contrary to mine?” See here,

(1.) What the *spirit of the Lord Jesus* was — not of *this world*, but from *above*. He was perfectly dead to the wealth of the world, the ease of the body, and the praise of men, and was wholly taken up with divine and heavenly things; and none shall be with him but those who are *born from above* and have their *conversation in heaven*.

(2.) How contrary to this *their* spirit was: “*You are from beneath*, and of this world.” The Pharisees were of a carnal worldly spirit; and what communion could Christ have with them?

2. He had said, *You shall die in your sins*, and here he stand to it: “Therefore I said, *You shall die in your sins*, because *you are from beneath*;” and he gives this further reason for it, *If you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins*, v. 24. See here,

(1.) What we are required to believe: *that I am he, hoti ego eimi* — *that I am*, which is one of God's names, ^{Exod}Exodus 3:14. It was the Son of God that there said, *Ehejeh asher Ehejeh* — *I will be what I will be*; for the deliverance of Israel was but a figure of good things to come, but now he saith, “*I am he*; he that should come, he that you expect the Messiah to be, that you would have me to be to you. I am more than the bare name of the Messiah; I do not only call myself so, but *I am he*.” True faith does not *amuse* the soul with an empty sound of words, but *affects* it with the doctrine of Christ's mediation, as a real thing that has real effects.

(2.) How necessary it is that we believe this. If we have not this faith, *we shall die in our sins*; for the matter is so settled that without this faith,

[1.] We cannot be saved from the power of sin while we live, and therefore shall certainly continue in it to the last. Nothing but the *doctrine* of Christ's grace will be an argument powerful enough, and none but the *Spirit* of Christ's grace will be an agent powerful enough, to turn us from sin to God; and that Spirit is given, and that doctrine given, to be effectual

to those only who believe in Christ: so that, if Satan be not by faith dispossessed, he has a lease of the soul for its life; if Christ do not cure us, our case is desperate, and we shall *die in our sins*.

[2.] Without faith we cannot be saved from the punishment of sin when we die, for the *wrath of God remains* upon them that believe not, ⁴¹⁶Mark 16:16. Unbelief is the damning sin; it is a sin against the remedy. Now this implies the great gospel promise: *If we believe that Christ is he*, and receive him accordingly, *we shall not die in our sins*. The law saith absolutely to all, as Christ said (v. 21), *You shall die in your sins*, for we are all guilty before God; but the gospel is a defeasance of the obligation upon condition of believing. The curse of the law is vacated and annulled to all that submit to the grace of the gospel. Believers die in Christ, in his love, in his arms, and so are saved from dying *in their sins*.

IV. Here is a further discourse concerning *himself*, occasioned by his requiring faith in himself as the condition of salvation, v. 25-29. Observe,

1. The question which the Jews put to him (v. 25): *Who art thou?* This they asked tauntingly, and not with any desire to be instructed. he had said, You must believe that *I am he*. By his not saying expressly who he was, he plainly intimated that in his person he was such a one as could not be *described* by any, and in his office such a one as was *expected* by all that looked for redemption in Israel; yet this awful manner of speaking, which had so much significancy in it, they turned to his reproach, as if he knew not what to say of himself: “*Who art thou*, that we must with an implicit faith believe in thee, that thou art some mighty HE, we know not *who* or *what*, nor are *worthy to know?*”

2. His answer to this question, wherein he directs them three ways for information: —

(1.) He refers them to *what he had said* all along: “Do you ask who I am? *Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.*” The original here is a little intricate, *ten archen ho ti kai lalo hymin* which some read thus: *I am the beginning, which also I speak unto you*. So Austin takes it. Christ is called *Arche* — *the beginning* (⁵⁰⁸Colossians 1:18; ⁶⁰⁸Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 3:14), and so it agrees with v. 24, *I am he*. Compare ²³⁰⁴Isaiah 41:4: *I am the first, I am he*. Those who object that it is the accusative case, and therefore not properly answering to *tis ei*, must undertake to construe by

grammar rules that parallel expression, ⁽⁶¹⁸⁾Revelation 1:8, *ho en*. But most interpreters agree with our version, Do you ask *who I am?*

[1.] I am *the same that I said to you from the beginning* of time in the scriptures of the Old-Testament, the same that from the beginning was said to be *the Seed of the woman, that should break the serpent's head*, the same that in all the ages of the church was the Mediator of the covenant, and the faith of the patriarchs.

[2.] *From the beginning* of my public ministry. The account he had already given of himself he resolved to *abide by*; he had declared himself to be the *Son of God* (⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾John 5:17), to be the Christ (⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾John 4:26), and the bread of life, and had proposed himself as the object of that faith which is necessary to salvation, and to this he refers them for an answer to their question. Christ is *one with himself*; what he had said from the beginning, he saith still. His is an *everlasting gospel*.

(2.) He refers them to his Father's judgment, and the instructions he had from him (v. 26): "*I have many things, more than you think of, to say, and in them to judge of you*. But why should I trouble myself any further with you? I know very well that *he who sent me is true*, and will stand by me, and bear me out, for *I speak to the world* (to which I am sent as an ambassador) *those things, all those and those only, which I have heard of him*." Here,

[1.] He suppresses his accusation of them. He had *many things* to charge them with, and many evidences to produce against them; but for the present he had said enough. Note, Whatever discoveries of sin are made to us, he that searches the heart has still more to judge of us, ⁽⁶¹⁰⁾1 John 3:20. How much soever God reckons with sinners in this world there is still a further reckoning yet behind, ⁽⁶²⁴⁾Deuteronomy 32:34. Let us learn hence not to be forward to say all we can say, even against the worst of men; we may have many things to say, by way of censure, which yet it is better to leave *unsaid*, for what is it to us?

[2.] He enters his appeal against them to his Father: *He that sent me*. Here two things comfort him: — *First*, That he had been *true to his Father*, and to the trust reposed in him: *I speak to the world* (for his gospel was to be preached to every creature) *those things which I have heard of him*. Being given for a *witness to the people* (⁽²⁵⁴⁾Isaiah 55:4), he was *Amen*, a *faithful witness*, ⁽⁶³⁴⁾Revelation 3:14. He did not *conceal* his doctrine, but spoke it

to the world (being of common concern, it was to be of common notice); nor did he change or alter it, nor vary from the instructions he received from him that sent him. *Secondly*, That his Father would be *true to him*; true to the promise that he would *make his mouth like a sharp sword*; true to his purpose concerning him, which was a *decree* (¹⁸¹⁷Psalm 2:7); true to the threatenings of his wrath against those that should reject him. Though he should not *accuse* them to his Father, yet the Father, who sent him, would undoubtedly reckon with them, and would be *true* to what he had said (¹⁷⁸³Deuteronomy 18:19), that whosoever would not hearken to that prophet whom God would raise up *he would require it of him*. Christ would not accuse them; “for,” saith he, “he that sent me is true, and will pass judgment on them, though I should not demand judgment against them.” Thus, when he *lets fall* the present prosecution, he *binds them over* to the judgment-day, when it will be too late to dispute what they will not now be persuaded to believe. *I, as a deaf man, heard not; for thou wilt hear*, ¹⁸⁸³Psalm 38:13, 15. Upon this part of our Saviour's discourse the evangelist has a melancholy remark (v. 27): *They understood not that he spoke to them of the Father*. See here,

1. The power of Satan to blind the minds of those who believe not. Though Christ spoke so plainly of God as his Father in heaven, yet they did not understand whom he meant, but thought he spoke of some father he had in Galilee. Thus the plainest things are riddles and parables to those who are resolved to hold fast their prejudices; day and night are alike to the blind.

2. The reason why the threatenings of the word make so little impression upon the minds of sinners; it is because they understand not whose the wrath is that is revealed in them. When Christ told them of the truth of him that sent him, as a warning to them to prepare for his judgment, which is *according to truth*, they slighted the warning, because they understood not to whose judgment it was that they made themselves obnoxious.

(3.) He refers them to *their own convictions* hereafter, v. 28, 29. He finds they will not understand him, and therefore adjourns the trial till further evidence should come in; they that *will not see shall see*, ²³¹¹Isaiah 26:11. Now observe here,

[1.] *What they should ere long be convinced of*: “*You shall know that I am he*, that Jesus is the true Messiah. Whether you will own it or no before

men, you shall be made to know it in your own consciences, the convictions of which, though you may *stifle*, yet you cannot *baffle*: *that I am he*, not that you represent me to be, but he that I preach myself to be, he that should come!" Two things they should be convinced of, in order to this: — *First*, That he did nothing *of himself*, not of himself as man, of himself alone, of himself without the Father, with whom he was *one*. He does not hereby derogate from his own inherent power, but only denies their charge against him as a *false prophet*; for of false prophets it is said that they prophesied *out of their own hearts*, and followed *their own spirits*. *Secondly*, That as *his Father taught him* so he *spoke these things*, that he was not *autodidaktos* — *selftaught*, but *Theodidaktos* — *taught of God*. The doctrine he preached was the counterpart of the counsels of God, with which he was intimately acquainted; *kathos edidaxe, tauta lalo* — I speak those things, not only *which* he taught me, but *as* he taught me, with the same divine power and authority.

[2.] *When they should be convinced of this: When you have lifted up the Son of man*, lifted him up upon the cross, as the brazen serpent upon the pole (⁴¹⁸⁴John 3:14), as the sacrifices under the law (for Christ is the great sacrifice), which, when they were offered, were said to be *elevated*, or *lifted up*; hence the burnt-offerings, the most ancient and honourable of all, were called *elevations* (*Gnoloth* from *Gnolah, asendit* — *he ascended*), and in many other offerings they used the significant ceremony of *heaving* the sacrifice up, and *moving* it before the Lord; thus was Christ *lifted up*. Or the expression denotes that his death was his exaltation. They that put him to death thought thereby for ever to have *sunk* him and his interest, but it proved to be the advancement of both, ⁴¹²⁴John 12:24. When the Son of man was *crucified*, the Son of man was *glorified*. Christ had called his dying his *going away*; here he calls it his being *lifted up*; thus the death of the saints, as it is their departure out of this world, so it is their advancement to a better. Observe, He speaks of those he is now talking with as the *instruments* of his death: *when you have lifted up the Son of man*; not that they were to be the *priests* to offer him up (no, that was his own act, he *offered up himself*), but they would be his betrayers and murderers; see ⁴¹²³Acts 2:23. They *lifted him up* to the cross, but then he lifted up himself to his Father. Observe with what tenderness and mildness Christ here speaks to those who he certainly knew would put him to death, to teach us not to hate or seek the hurt of any, though we may have reason to think they hate us and seek our hurt. Now, Christ speaks of his death as

that which would be a powerful conviction of the infidelity of the Jews. *When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know this.* And why then? *First*, Because careless and unthinking people are often taught the worth of mercies by the want of them, ^{<4172>}Luke 17:22. *Secondly*, The guilt of their sin in putting Christ to death would so awaken their consciences that they would be put upon serious enquiries after a Saviour, and then would know that Jesus was he who alone could save them. And so it proved, when, being told that with wicked hands they had *crucified and slain* the Son of God, they cried out, *What shall we do?* and were made to know assuredly that this Jesus was *Lord and Christ*, ^{<4126>}Acts 2:36. *Thirdly*, There would be such signs and wonders attending his death, and the *lifting of him up* from death in his resurrection, as would give a stronger proof of his being the Messiah than any that had been yet given: and multitudes were hereby brought to believe that Jesus is the Christ, who had before contradicted and opposed him. *Fourthly*, By the death of Christ the pouring out of the Spirit was purchased, who would convince the world that *Jesus is he*, ^{<3817>}John 16:7, 8. *Fifthly*, The judgments which the Jews brought upon themselves, by putting Christ to death, which filled up the measure of their iniquity, were a sensible conviction to the most hardened among them that *Jesus was he*. Christ had often foretold that desolation as the just punishment of their invincible unbelief, and *when it came to pass (lo, it did come)* they could not but know that the great prophet had been among them, ^{<3833>}Ezekiel 33:33.

[3.] What supported our Lord Jesus in the mean time (v. 29): *He that sent me is with me*, in my whole undertaking; *for the Father* (the fountain and first spring of this affair, from whom as its great cause and author it is derived) *hath not left me alone*, to manage it myself, hath not deserted the business nor me in the prosecution of it, for *do I always those things that please him*. Here is,

First, The assurance which Christ had of his Father's *presence* with him, which includes both a divine *power* going along with him to *enable* him for his work, and a divine *favour* manifested to him to *encourage* him in it. *He that sent me is with me*, ^{<3401>}Isaiah 42:1; ^{<3821>}Psalms 89:21. This greatly *emboldens* our faith in Christ and our reliance upon his word that he had, and knew he had, his Father with him, to *confirm the word of his servant*, ^{<3405>}Isaiah 44:26. The King of kings accompanied his own ambassador, to attest his mission and assist his management, and *never left him alone*, either solitary or weak; it also *aggravated* the wickedness of those that

opposed him, and was an intimation to them of the *premunire* they ran themselves into by resisting him, for thereby they were found *fighters against God*. How easily soever they might think to crush him and run him down, let them know he had one to back him with whom it is the greatest madness that can be to *contend*.

Secondly, The ground of this assurance: *For I do always those things that please him*. That is,

1. That great affair in which our Lord Jesus was *continually* engaged was an affair which the *Father that sent him* was highly *well pleased with*. His whole undertaking is called the *pleasure of the Lord* (²⁵³⁰ Isaiah 53:10), because of the counsels of the eternal mind about it, and the complacency of the eternal mind in it.
2. His management of that affair was in nothing *displeasing* to his Father; in executing his commission he punctually observed all his instructions, and did in nothing vary from them. No mere man since the fall could say such a word as this (for *in many things we offend all*) but our Lord Jesus never offended his Father in any thing, but, as became him, he *fulfilled all righteousness*. This was necessary to the validity and value of the sacrifice he was to offer up; for if he had in any thing *displeased* the Father himself, and so had had any sin of his own to answer for, the Father could not have been pleased with him as a propitiation for our sins; but such a priest and such a sacrifice became us as was perfectly pure and spotless. We may likewise learn hence that God's servants may *then* expect God's presence with them when they *choose* and do *those things that please him*, (²³⁰⁴ Isaiah 66:4, 5.

V. Here is the good effect which this discourse of Christ's had upon some of his hearers (v. 30): *As he spoke these words many believed on him*.
Note,

1. Though multitudes perish in their unbelief, yet there is a remnant according to the election of grace, who *believe to the saving of the soul*. If Israel, the whole body of the people, *be not gathered*, yet there are those of them in whom Christ will be *glorious*, (²³⁰⁵ Isaiah 49:5. This the apostle insists upon, to reconcile the Jews' rejection with the *promises made unto their fathers*. There is a remnant, (⁴¹¹⁵ Romans 11:5.

2. The words of Christ, and particularly his *threatening* words, are made effectual by the grace of God to bring in poor souls to believe in him. When Christ told them that if they *believed not* they should *die in their sins*, and never get to heaven, they thought it was time to look about them, Rom, 1:16, 18.

3. Sometimes there is a *wide door opened*, and an *effectual* one, even where they are *many adversaries*. Christ will carry on his work, though *the heathen rage*. The gospel sometimes gains great victories where it meets with great opposition. Let this encourage God's ministers to preach the gospel, though it be with *much contention*, for they shall not *labour in vain*. Many may be *secretly* brought home to God by those endeavours which are openly contradicted and cavilled at by men of corrupt minds. Austin has an affectionate ejaculation in his lecture upon these words: *Utinam et, me loquenti, multi credant; non in me, sed mecum in eo* — *I wish that when I speak, many may believe, not on me, but with me on him.*

JOHN 8:31-37

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

We have in these verses,

1. A comfortable doctrine laid down concerning the *spiritual liberty* of Christ's disciples, intended for the encouragement of *those Jews that believed*. Christ, knowing that his doctrine began to work upon some of his hearers, and perceiving that virtue had gone out of him, turned his discourse from the proud Pharisees, and addressed himself to those *weak* believers. When he had denounced wrath against those that were hardened in unbelief, then he spoke comfort to those few feeble *Jews that believed in him*. See here,

1. How graciously the Lord Jesus looks to those that *tremble at his word*, and are ready to receive it; he has something to say to those who have hearing ears, and will not pass by those who set themselves in his way, without speaking to them.

2. How carefully he cherishes the beginnings of grace, and meets those that are coming towards him. These *Jews that believed* were yet but *weak*;

but Christ did not therefore cast them off, for he *gathers the lambs in his arms*. When faith is in its infancy, he has *knees to prevent it, breasts for it to suck*, that it may not *die from the womb*. In what he said to them, we have two things, which he saith to all that should at any time believe: —

(1.) The character of a true disciple of Christ: *If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed*. When they *believed on him*, as the great prophet, they gave up themselves to be *his disciples*. Now, at their entrance into his school, he lays down this for a settled rule, that he would own none for his disciples but those that *continued in his word*.

[1.] It is implied that there are many who profess themselves Christ's disciples who are not his *disciples indeed*, but only in show and name.

[2.] It highly concerns those that are not *strong in faith* to see to it that they be *sound in the faith*, that, though not disciples of the highest form, they are nevertheless *disciples indeed*.

[3.] Those who seem willing to be Christ's disciples ought to be told that they had as good never come to him, unless they come with a resolution by his grace to abide by him. Let those who have thoughts of covenanting with Christ have no thoughts of reserving a power of revocation. Children are sent to school, and bound apprentices, only for a *few years*; but those only are Christ's who are willing to be bound to him *for the term of life*.

[4.] Those only that *continue in Christ's word* shall be accepted as his *disciples indeed*, that adhere to his word in every instance without partiality, and abide by it to the end without apostasy. It is *menein* — *to dwell* in Christ's word, as a man does at home, which is his centre, and rest, and refuge. Our converse with the word and conformity to it must be constant. If we continue disciples to the last, then, and not otherwise, we approve ourselves *disciples indeed*.

(2.) The privilege of a true disciple of Christ. Here are two precious promises made to those who thus approve themselves disciples indeed, v. 32.

[1.] “*You shall know the truth*, shall know all that truth which it is needful and profitable for you to know, and shall be more confirmed in the belief of it, shall know the certainty of it.” Note, *First*, Even those who are true believers, and disciples indeed, yet may be, and are, much in the dark concerning many things which they should know. God's children are but

children, and understand and speak as children. Did we not need to be taught, we should not need to be disciples. *Secondly*, It is a very great privilege to *know the truth*, to know the particular truths which we are to believe, in their mutual dependences and connections, and the grounds and reasons of our belief, — to know what is truth and what proves it to be so. *Thirdly*, It is a gracious promise of Christ, to all who continue in his word, that they shall know the truth as far as is needful and profitable for them. Christ's scholars are sure to be well taught.

[2.] *The truth shall make you free*; that is, *First*, The truth which Christ teaches tends to make men free, ²⁶⁰ Isaiah 61:1. Justification makes us free from the guilt of sin, by which we were *bound over* to the judgment of God, and *bound under* amazing fears; sanctification makes us free from the bondage of corruption, by which we were *restrained* from that service which is perfect freedom, and *constrained* to that which is perfect slavery. Gospel truth frees us from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and the more grievous burdens of the traditions of the elders. It makes us *free from* our spiritual enemies, free *in* the service of God, free *to* the privileges of sons, and free *of* the Jerusalem which is from above, which is free. *Secondly*, The knowing, entertaining, and believing, of this truth does actually *make us free*, free from prejudices, mistakes, and false notions, than which nothing more *enslaves* and *entangles* the soul, free from the dominion of lust and passion; and restores the soul to the government of itself, by reducing it into obedience to its Creator. The mind, by admitting the truth of Christ in the light and power, is vastly enlarged, and has scope and compass given it, is greatly elevated and raised above things of sense, and never acts with so true a liberty as when it acts under a divine command, ²⁶¹ 2 Corinthians 3:17. The enemies of Christianity pretend to *free thinking*, whereas really those are the freest reasonings that are guided by faith, and those are men of *free thought* whose thoughts are captivated and brought into obedience to Christ.

II. The offence which the carnal Jews took at this doctrine, and their objection against it. Though it was a doctrine that brought glad tidings of liberty to the captives, yet they cavilled at it, v. 33. The Pharisees grudged this comfortable word to those that believed, the standers by, who had *no part nor lot in this matter*; they thought themselves reflected upon and affronted by the gracious charter of liberty granted to those that believed, and therefore with a great deal of pride and envy they answered him, “*We Jews are Abraham's seed*, and therefore are *free-born*, and have not lost

our birthright-freedom; *we were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou then, to us Jews, You shall be made free?*” See here,

1. What it was that they were grieved at; it was an *innuendo* in those words, *You shall be made free*, as if the Jewish church and nation were in some sort of bondage, which reflected on the Jews in general, and as if all that did not believe in Christ continued in that bondage, which reflected on the Pharisees in particular. Note, The privileges of the faithful are the envy and vexation of unbelievers, ^{<HE20>}Psalm 112:10.

2. What it was that they alleged against it; whereas Christ intimated that they needed to be made free, they urge,

(1.) “We are Abraham's seed, and Abraham was a *prince and a great man*; though we live in Canaan, we are not descended from Canaan, nor under his doom, *a servant of servants shall he be*; we hold in *frank-almoign* — *free alms*, and not in *villanage* — *by a servile tenure*.” It is common for a sinking decaying family to boast of the glory and dignity of its ancestors, and to borrow honour from that name to which they repay disgrace; so the Jews here did. But this was not all. Abraham was in covenant with God, and his children by his right, ^{<S1D>}Romans 11:28. Now that covenant, no doubt, was a free charter, and invested them with privileges not consistent with a state of slavery, ^{<S1D>}Romans 9:4. And therefore they thought they had no occasion with so *great a sum* as they reckoned faith in Christ to be *to obtain this freedom*, when they were thus free-born. Note, It is the common fault and folly of those that have pious parentage and education to trust to their privilege and boast of it, as if it would atone for the want of real holiness. They were Abraham's seed, but what would this avail them, when we find one in hell that could call Abraham father? Saving benefits are not, like common privileges, conveyed by *entail* to us and our issue, nor can a title to heaven be made by *descent*, nor may we claim as *heirs at law*, by making out our pedigree; our title is purely by purchase, not our own but our Redeemer's for us, under certain provisos and limitations, which if we do not observe it will not avail us to be Abraham's seed. Thus many, when they are pressed with the necessity of regeneration, turn it off with this, *We are the church's children*; but they are not all Israel that are of Israel.

(2.) *We were never in bondage to any man*. Now observe,

[1.] How false this allegation was. I wonder how they could have the assurance to say a thing in the face of a congregation which was so notoriously *untrue*. Were not the seed of Abraham in bondage to the Egyptians? Were they not often in bondage to the neighbouring nations in the time of the judges? Were they not seventy years captives in Babylon? Nay, were they not at this time tributaries to the Romans, and, though not in a *personal*, yet in a *national* bondage to them, and groaning to be made free? And yet, to confront Christ, they have the impudence to say, *We were never in bondage*. Thus they would expose Christ to the ill-will both of the Jews, who were very jealous for the honour of their liberty, and of the Romans, who would not be thought to enslave the nations they conquered.

[2.] How foolish the application was. Christ had spoken of a liberty wherewith the *truth* would make them free, which must be meant of a *spiritual* liberty, for truth as it is the *enriching*, so it is the *enfranchising* of the mind, and the *enlarging* of that from the captivity of error and prejudice; and yet they plead against the offer of *spiritual* liberty that they were never in *corporal* thralldom, as if, because they were never in bondage to any *man*, they were never in bondage to any *lust*. Note, Carnal hearts are sensible of no other grievances than those that molest the body and injure their secular affairs. Talk to them of encroachments upon their civil liberty and property, — tell them of waste committed upon their lands, or damage done to their houses, — and they understand you very well, and can give you a sensible answer; the thing touches them and affects them. But discourse to them of the bondage of sin, a captivity to Satan, and a liberty by Christ, — tell them of wrong done to their precious souls, and the hazard of their eternal welfare, — and *you bring certain strange things to their ears*; they say of it (as those did, ²⁶⁰⁹Ezekiel 20:49), *Doth he not speak parables?* This was much like the blunder Nicodemus made about being *born again*.

III. Our Saviour's vindication of his doctrine from these objections, and the further explication of it, v. 34-37, where he does these four things: —

1. He shows that, notwithstanding their civil liberties and their visible church-membership, yet it was possible that they might be in a state of bondage (v. 34): *Whosoever commits sin*, though he be of Abraham's seed, and was never in bondage to any man, is the servant of sin. Observe, Christ does not upbraid them with the falsehood of their plea, or their

present bondage, but further explains what he had said for their edification. Thus ministers should with meekness instruct those that oppose them, that they may *recover themselves*, not with passion provoke them to entangle themselves yet more. Now here,

(1.) The preface is very solemn: *Verily, verily, I say unto you*; an awful asseveration, which our Saviour often used, to command a reverent attention and a ready assent. The style of the prophets was, *Thus saith the Lord*, for they were *faithful as servants*; but Christ, being a Son, speaks in his own name: *I say unto you*, I the *Amen*, the faithful witness; he pawns his veracity upon it. “I say it to you, who boast of your relation to Abraham, as if that would save you.”

(2.) The truth is of universal concern, though here delivered upon a particular occasion: *Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin*, and sadly needs to be made free. A state of sin is a state of bondage.

[1.] See who it is on whom this brand is fastened — on him that *commits sin*, *pas ho poion hamartian* — *every one that makes sin*. There is not a *just man* upon earth, that *lives, and sins not*; yet every one that sins is not a servant of sin, for then God would have no servants; but he that *makes sin*, that *makes choice* of sin, prefers the way of wickedness before the way of holiness (²⁴⁴¹⁶Jeremiah 44:16, 17), — that *makes a covenant* with sin, enters into league with it, and *makes a marriage* with it, — that *makes contrivances* of sin, *makes provision* for the flesh, and devises iniquity, — and that *makes a custom* of sin, who walks after the flesh, and *makes a trade* of sin.

[2.] See what the brand is which Christ fastens upon those that thus *commit sin*. He stigmatizes them, gives them a mark of servitude. They are *servants of sin*, imprisoned under the guilt of sin, under an arrest, in hold for it, *concluded under sin*, and they are subject to the power of sin. He is a *servant of sin*, that is, he makes himself so, and is so accounted; he has *sold himself to work wickedness*; his lusts give law to him, he is at their beck, and is not his own master. He does the work of sin, supports its interest, and accepts its wages, ²⁴¹⁶⁶Romans 6:16.

2. He shows them that, being in a state of bondage, their having a place in the house of God would not entitle them to the inheritance of sons; for (v. 35) *the servant*, though he be in the house for awhile, yet, being but a *servant, abideth not in the house for ever*. Services (we say) are no

inheritances, they are but *temporary*, and not for a *perpetuity*; but the son of the family abideth ever. Now,

(1.) This points primarily at the rejection of the Jewish church and nation. Israel had been *God's son*, his *first-born*; but they wretchedly degenerated into a *servile* disposition, were enslaved to the world and the flesh, and therefore, though by virtue of their birthright they thought themselves secure of their church membership, Christ tells them that having thus made themselves servants they should not *abide in the house for ever*. Jerusalem, by opposing the gospel of Christ, which proclaimed liberty, and adhering to the Sinai-covenant, which gendered to bondage, after its term was *expired* came to be *in bondage with her children* (^{<402>}Galatians 4:24, 25), and therefore was unchurched and disfranchised, her charter seized and taken away, and she was cast out as the son of the bond-woman, ^{<1214>}Genesis 21:14. Chrysostom gives this sense of this place: "Think not to be made free from sin by the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses, for Moses was but a servant, and had not that perpetual authority in the church which the Son had; but, if the Son make you free, it is well," v. 36. But,

(2.) It looks further, to the rejection of all that are the *servants of sin*, and receive not the *adoption* of the *sons of God*; though those unprofitable servants may be in God's house awhile, as retainers to his family, yet there is a day coming when the children of the *bond-woman* and of the *free* shall be distinguished. True believers only, who are the children of the promise and of the covenant, are accounted free, and shall abide for ever in the house, as Isaac: they shall have a *nail* in the holy place on earth (^{<1398>}Ezra 9:8) and *mansions* in the holy place in heaven, ^{<494>}John 14:2.

3. He shows them the way of deliverance out of the state of bondage into the *glorious liberty of the children of God*, ^{<482>}Romans 8:21. The case of those that are the servants of sin is sad, but thanks be to God it is not helpless, it is not hopeless. As it is the privilege of all the sons of the family, and their dignity above the servants, that they abide in the house for ever; so he who is *the Son*, the first-born among many brethren, and the heir of all things, has a power both of manumission and of adoption (v. 36): *If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed*. Note,

(1.) Jesus Christ in the gospel offers us *our freedom*; he has authority and power to *make free*.

[1.] To *discharge prisoners*; this he does *in justification*, by making satisfaction for *our guilt* (on which the gospel offer is grounded, which is to all a conditional *act of indemnity*, and to all true believers, upon their believing, an absolute *charter of pardon*), and for *our debts*, for which we were by the law arrested and in execution. Christ, as our surety, or rather our *bail* (for he was not originally bound *with us*, but upon our insolvency bound *for us*), compounds with the creditor, answers the demands of injured justice with more than an *equivalent*, takes the *bond and judgment* into his own hands, and gives them up *cancelled* to all that by faith and repentance give him (if I may so say) a *counter-security* to save his honour harmless, and so they are *made free*; and from the debt, and every part thereof, they are for ever acquitted, exonerated, and discharged, and a general release is sealed of all actions and claims; while against those who refuse to come up to these terms the securities lie still in the Redeemer's hands, in full force.

[2.] He has a power to rescue *bond-slaves*, and this he does in *sanctification*; by the powerful arguments of his gospel, and the powerful operations of his Spirit, he breaks the power of corruption in the soul, rallies the scattered forces of reason and virtue, and fortifies God's interest against sin and Satan, and so the soul is made free.

[3.] He has a power to *naturalize strangers and foreigners*, and this he does in *adoption*. This is a further act of grace; we are not only forgiven and healed, but *preferred*; there is a charter of privileges as well as pardon; and thus the Son makes us free *denizens* of the kingdom of priests, the holy nation, the new Jerusalem.

(2.) Those whom Christ makes free are *free indeed*. It is not *alethos*, the word used (v. 31) for disciples *indeed*, but *ontos* — *really*. It denotes,

[1.] The truth and certainty of the promise, the liberty which the Jews boasted of was an *imaginary* liberty; they boasted of a *false gift*; but the liberty which Christ gives is a certain thing, it is real, and has real effects. The servants of sin promise themselves liberty, and fancy themselves free, when they have broken religion's bands asunder; but they cheat themselves. None are *free indeed* but those whom Christ *makes free*.

[2.] It denotes the singular excellency of the freedom promised; it is a freedom that deserves the name, in comparison with which all other liberties are no better than slaveries, so much does it turn to the honour

and advantage of those that are *made free* by it. It is a *glorious* liberty. It is that which *is* (so *ontos* signifies); it is *substance* (²⁰⁸²Proverbs 8:21); while the things of the world are shadows, things that *are not*.

4. He applies this to these unbelieving cavilling Jews, in answer to their boasts of relation to Abraham (v. 37): “*I know very well that you are Abraham's seed, but now you seek to kill me, and therefore have forfeited the honour of your relation to Abraham, because my word hath no place in you.*” Observe here,

(1.) The dignity of their extraction admitted: “*I know that you are Abraham's seed, every one knows it, and it is your honour.*” He grants them what was true, and in what they said that was false (that they were *never* in bondage to any) he does not *contradict* them, for he studied to *profit* them, and not to *provoke* them, and therefore said that which would please them: *I know that you are Abraham's seed.* They boasted of their descent from *Abraham*, as that which *aggrandized* their names, and made them exceedingly honourable; whereas really it did but *aggravate* their crimes, and make them exceedingly sinful. Out of their own mouths will he judge vain-glorious hypocrites, who boast of their parentage and education: “Are you Abraham's seed? Why then did you not tread in the steps of his faith and obedience?”

(2.) The inconsistency of their practice with this dignity: *But you seek to kill me.* They had attempted it several times, and were now designing it, which quickly appeared (v. 59), when they *took up stones to cast at him.* Christ knows all the wickedness, not only which men do, but which they seek, and design, and endeavour to do. To seek to kill any innocent man is a crime black enough, but to *compass and imagine* the death of him that was King of kings was a crime the heinousness of which we want words to express.

(3.) The reason of this inconsistency. Why were they that were Abraham's seed so very inveterate against Abraham's promised seed, in whom they and *all the families of the earth* should be *blessed*? Our Saviour here tells them, It is because *my word hath no place in you, ou chorei en hymin, Non capit in vobis*, so the Vulgate. “*My word does not take with you, you have no inclination to it, no relish of it, other things are more taking, more pleasing.*” Or, “It does not *take hold of you*, it has no power over you, makes no impression upon you.” Some of the critics read it, *My word does not penetrate into you*; it descended as the rain, but it came upon them as

the rain upon the rock, which it runs off, and did not soak into their hearts, as the rain upon the ploughed ground. The Syriac reads it, "*Because you do not acquiesce in my word; you are not persuaded of the truth of it, nor pleased with the goodness of it.*" Our translation is very significant: *It has no place in you. They sought to kill him, and so effectually to silence him, not because he had done them any harm, but because they could not bear the convincing, commanding power of his word.* Note,

[1.] The words of Christ ought to have a place in us, the innermost and uppermost place, — a *dwelling* place, as a man at home, and not as a stranger or sojourner, — a *working* place; it must have room to operate, to work sin out of us, and to work grace in us; it must have a *ruling* place, its place must be *upon the throne*, it must dwell in us richly.

[2.] There are many that make a profession of religion in whom *the word of Christ* has no place; they will not *allow* it a place, for they do not like it; Satan does all he can to *displace* it; and other things possess the place it should have in us.

[3.] Where the word of God has no place no good is to be expected, for room is left there for all wickedness. If the unclean spirit find the heart empty of Christ's word, he *enters in, and dwells there*.

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CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

Here Christ and the Jews are still at issue; he sets himself to convince and convert them, while they still set themselves to contradict and oppose him.

I. He here traces the difference between his sentiments and theirs to a different rise and origin (v. 38): *I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.* Here are two fathers spoken of, according to the two families into which the sons of men are divided — God and the devil, and without controversy these are contrary the one to the other.

1. Christ's *doctrine* was from *heaven*; it was *copied* out of the *counsels* of infinite wisdom, and the kind intentions of eternal love.

(1.) *I speak that which I have seen.* The discoveries Christ has made to us of God and another world are not grounded upon guess and hearsay, but upon ocular inspection; so that he was thoroughly *apprized* of the nature, and *assured* of the truth, of all he said. He that is given to be a witness to the people is an eye-witness, and therefore unexceptionable.

(2.) It is what I have seen *with my Father.* The doctrine of Christ is not a plausible hypothesis, supported by probable arguments, but it is an exact counterpart of the incontestable truths lodged in the eternal mind. It was not only what he had *heard from his Father*, but what he had *seen with him* when *the counsel of peace was between them both*. Moses spoke what he heard from God, but he might not see the face of God; Paul had been in the third heaven, but what he had seen there he could not, he must not, utter; for it was Christ's prerogative to have *seen* what he *spoke*, and to *speak* what he had *seen*.

2. Their *doings* were from hell: "*You do that which you have seen with your father.* You do, by your own works, father yourselves, for it is evident whom you resemble, and therefore easy to find out your origin." As a child that is trained up with his father learns his father's words and fashions, and grows like him by an affected imitation as well as by a natural image, so these Jews, by their malicious opposition to Christ and the gospel, made themselves as like the devil as if they had industriously set him before them for their pattern.

II. He takes off and answers their vain-glorious boasts of relation to Abraham and to God as their fathers, and shows the vanity and falsehood of their pretensions.

1. They pleaded relation to Abraham, and he replies to this plea. *They said, Abraham is our father*, v. 39. In this they intended,

(1.) To do honour to themselves, and to make themselves look great. They had forgotten the mortification given them by that acknowledgement prescribed them (^{486B}Deuteronomy 26:5), *A Syrian ready to perish was my father*; and the charge exhibited against their degenerate ancestors (whose steps they trod in, and not those of the first founder of the family), *Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite*, ^{236B}Ezekiel 16:3. As it is common for those families that are sinking and going to decay to boast most of their pedigree, so it is common for those churches that are corrupt and depraved to value themselves upon their antiquity and the eminence of

their first planters. *Fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium — We have been Trojans, and there once was Troy.*

(2.) They designed to cast an odium upon Christ as if he reflected upon the patriarch Abraham, in speaking of their father as one they had learned evil from. See how they sought an occasion to quarrel with him. Now Christ overthrows this plea, and exposes the vanity of it by a plain and cogent argument: “Abraham's children will do the works of Abraham, but you do not do Abraham's works, therefore you are not Abraham's children.”

[1.] The proposition is plain: “*If you were Abraham's children, such children of Abraham as could claim an interest in the covenant made with him and his seed, which would indeed put an honour upon you, then you would do the works of Abraham, for to those only of Abraham's house who kept the way of the Lord, as Abraham did, would God perform what he had spoken,*” ^{<189>}Genesis 18:19. Those only are reckoned the seed of Abraham, to whom the promise belongs, who *tread in the steps* of his faith and obedience, ^{<192>}Romans 4:12. Though the Jews had their genealogies, and kept them exact, yet they could not by them make out their relation to Abraham, so as to take the benefit of the old entail (*performam doni — according to the form of the gift*), unless they walked in the same spirit; good women's relation to Sarah is proved only by this — *whose daughters you are as long as you do well*, and no longer, ^{<196>}1 Peter 3:6. Note, Those who would approve themselves Abraham's seed must not only be of Abraham's faith, but do Abraham's works (^{<202>}James 2:21, 22), — must come at God's call, as he did, — must resign their dearest comforts to him, — must be strangers and sojourners in this world, — must keep up the worship of God in their families, and always walk before God in their uprightness; for these were the works of Abraham.

[2.] The assumption is evident likewise: *But you do not do the works of Abraham, for you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham*, v. 40.

First, He shows them what their work was, their present work, which they were now about; they *sought to kill him*; and three things are intimated as an aggravation of their intention: —

1. They were so *unnatural* as to seek the life of *a man*, a man like themselves, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, who had done

them no harm, nor given them any provocation. You *imagine mischief against a man*, ^{<66B>}Psalm 62:3.

2. They were so *ungrateful* as to seek the life of one who had *told them the truth*, had not only done them no injury, but had done them the greatest kindness that could be; had not only not imposed upon them with a lie, but had instructed them in the most necessary and important truths; *was he therefore become their enemy?* 3. They were so *ungodly* as to seek the life of one who told them the truth *which he had heard from God*, who was a messenger sent from God to them, so that their attempt against him was *quasi deicidium* — *an act of malice against God*. This was their work, and they persisted in it.

Secondly, He shows them that this did not become the children of Abraham; for *this did not Abraham*.

1. “He did nothing like this.” He was famous for his humanity, witness his rescue of the captives; and for his piety, witness his obedience to the heavenly vision in many instances, and some tender ones. Abraham believed God; they were obstinate in unbelief: Abraham followed God; they fought against him; so that he would be *ignorant of them, and would not acknowledge them*, they were so unlike him, ^{<256>}Isaiah 63:16. See ^{<225>}Jeremiah 22:15-17.

2. “He would not have done thus if he had lived now, or I had lived then.” *Hoc Abraham non fecisset* — *He would not have done this*; so some read it. We should thus reason ourselves out of any way of wickedness; would Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob have done so? We cannot expect to be *ever with them*, if we be *never like them*.

[3.] The conclusion follows of course (v. 41): “Whatever your boasts and pretensions be, you are not Abraham's children, but father yourselves upon another family (v. 41); there is *a father whose deeds you do*, whose spirit you are of, and whom you resemble.” He does not *yet* say plainly that he means the devil, till they by their continued cavils forced him so to explain himself, which teaches us to treat even bad men with civility and respect, and not to be forward to say that *of them, or to them*, which, though *true*, sounds *harsh*. He tried whether they would suffer their own consciences to infer from what he said that they were the devil's children; and it is better to hear it from them now that we are called to *repent*, that is, to change our

father and change our family, by changing our spirit and way, than to hear it from Christ in the great day.

2. So far were they from owning their unworthiness of relation to Abraham that they pleaded relation to God himself as their Father: “We are *not born of fornication*, we are not bastards, but legitimate sons; *we have one Father, even God.*”

(1.) Some understand this literally. They were not the sons of the bondwoman, as the Ishmaelites were; nor begotten in incest, as the Moabites and Ammonites were (^{<62B>}Deuteronomy 23:3); nor were they a spurious brood in Abraham's family, but Hebrews of the Hebrews; and, being born in *lawful wedlock*, they might call God *Father*, who instituted that honourable estate in innocency; for a legitimate seed, not tainted with divorces nor the plurality of wives, is called a *seed of God*, ^{<30D>}Malachi 2:15.

(2.) Others take it figuratively. They begin to be aware now that Christ spoke of a *spiritual* not a *carnal* father, of the father of their religion; and so,

[1.] They deny themselves to be a generation of idolaters: “We are *not born of fornication*, are not the children of idolatrous parents, nor have been bred up in idolatrous worships.” Idolatry is often spoken of as spiritual *whoredom*, and idolaters as *children of whoredoms*, ^{<30D>}Hosea 2:4; ^{<25B>}Isaiah 57:3. Now, if they meant that they were not the posterity of idolaters, the allegation was false, for no nation was more addicted to idolatry than the Jews before the captivity; if they meant no more than that they themselves were not idolaters, what then? A man may be free from idolatry, and yet perish in another iniquity, and be shut out of Abraham's covenant. *If thou commit no idolatry* (apply it to this spiritual fornication), yet if thou kill thou art become a *transgressor* of the covenant. A rebellious prodigal son will be disinherited, though he be not *born of fornication*.

[2.] They boast themselves to be true worshippers of the true God. We have not many fathers, as the heathens had, *gods many and lords many*, and yet were without God, as *filius populi* — *a son of the people*, has many fathers and yet none certain; no, *the Lord our God is one Lord and one Father*, and therefore it is well with us. Note, Those flatter themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls, who imagine

that their professing the true religion and worshipping the true God will save them, though they worship not God in spirit and in truth, nor are true to their profession. Now our Saviour gives a full answer to this fallacious plea (v. 42, 43), and proves, by two arguments, that they had no right to call God Father.

First, They did not love Christ: If God were your Father, you would love me. He had disproved their relation to Abraham by their going about to kill him (v. 40), but here he disproves their relation to God by their not loving and owning him. A man may pass for a *child* of Abraham if he do not appear an enemy to Christ by gross sin; but he cannot approve himself a child of God unless he be a faithful friend and follower of Christ. Note, All that have God for their Father have a true love to Jesus Christ, and esteem of his person, a grateful sense of his love, a sincere affection to his cause and kingdom, a complacency in the salvation wrought out by him and in the method and terms of it, and a care to keep his commandments, which is the surest evidence of our love to him. We are here in a state of probation, upon our trial how we will conduct ourselves towards our Maker, and accordingly it will be with us in the state of retribution. God has taken various methods to prove us, and this was one: he sent his Son into the world, with sufficient proofs of his sonship and mission, concluding that all that called him Father would *kiss his Son*, and bid *him* welcome who was the first-born among many brethren; see ^{<41>}1 John 5:1. By this our adoption will be proved or disproved — Did we love Christ, or no? *If any man do not*, he is so far from being a child of God that he is *anathema*, accursed, ^{<42>}1 Corinthians 16:22. Now our Saviour proves that if they were God's children they would *love him*; for, saith he, I proceeded *forth and came from God*. They will love him; for,

1. He was the *Son of God: I proceeded forth from God*. *Exelthon* this means his divine *exeleusis*, or origin from the Father, by the communication of the divine essence, and also the union of the divine *logos* to his human nature; so Dr. Whitby. Now this could not but recommend him to the affections of all that were *born of God*. Christ is called the *beloved*, because, being the beloved of the Father, he is certainly the beloved of all the saints, ^{<43>}Ephesians 1:6.

2. He was *sent of God*, came from him as an ambassador to the world of mankind. He did not *come of himself*, as the false prophets, who had not either their *mission* or their *message* from God, ^{<44>}Jeremiah 23:21.

Observe the emphasis he lays upon this: *I came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.* He had both his credentials and his instructions from God; he came to *gather together in one the children of God* (^{<415>}John 11:51), to bring *many sons to glory*, ^{<301>}Hebrews 2:10. And would not all God's children embrace with both arms a messenger sent from their Father on *such* errands? But these Jews made it appear that they were nothing akin to God, by their want of affection to Jesus Christ.

Secondly, They did not understand him. It was a sign they did not belong to God's family that they did not understand the language and dialect of the family: *You do not understand my speech* (v. 43), *ten lalian ten emen*. Christ's speech was divine and heavenly, but intelligible enough to those that were acquainted with the voice of Christ in the Old Testament. Those that had made the word of the Creator familiar to them needed no other key to the dialect of the Redeemer; and yet these Jews make strange of the doctrine of Christ, and find knots in it, and I know not what stumbling stones. Could a Galilean be known by his speech? An Ephraimite by his *sibboleth*? And would any have the confidence to call God Father to whom the Son of God was a barbarian, even when he spoke the will of God in the words of the Spirit of God? Note, Those who are not acquainted with the divine speech have reason to fear that they are strangers to the divine nature. Christ spoke the words of God (^{<434>}John 3:34) in the dialect of the kingdom of God; and yet they, who pretended to belong to the kingdom, understood not the idioms and properties of it, but like strangers, and rude ones too, ridiculed it. And the reason why they did not understand Christ's speech made the matter much worse: *Even because you cannot hear my word*, that is, "You cannot persuade yourselves to hear it attentively, impartially, and without prejudice, as it should be heard." The meaning of this *cannot* is an obstinate *will not*; as the Jews could not hear Stephen (^{<405>}Acts 7:57) nor Paul, ^{<422>}Acts 23:22. Note, The rooted antipathy of men's corrupt hearts to the doctrine of Christ is the true reason of their ignorance of it, and of their errors and mistakes about it. They do not like it nor love it, and therefore they will not understand it; like Peter, who pretended he *knew not what the damsel said* (^{<435>}Matthew 26:70), when in truth he knew not what to say to it. *You cannot hear my words*, for you have *stopped your ears* (^{<384>}Psalms 58:4, 5), and God, in a way of righteous judgment, *has made your ears heavy*, ^{<310>}Isaiah 6:10.

III. Having thus disproved their relation both to Abraham and to God, he comes next to tell them plainly whose children they were: *You are of your father the devil*, v. 44. If they were not God's children, they were the devil's, for God and Satan divide the world of mankind; the devil is therefore said to *work in the children of disobedience*, ^{<411>}Ephesians 2:2. All wicked people are the devil's children, *children of Belial* (^{<415>}2 Corinthians 6:15), the serpent's seed (^{<415>}Genesis 3:15), children of the wicked one, ^{<413>}Matthew 13:38. They partake of his nature, bear his image, obey his commands, and follow his example. Idolaters *said to a stock*, *Thou art our father*, ^{<417>}Jeremiah 2:27.

This is a high charge, and sounds very harsh and horrid, that any of the children of men, especially the church's children, should be called *children of the devil*, and therefore our Saviour fully proves it.

1. By a general argument: *The lusts of your father you will do*, *thelete poiein*.

(1.) “You *do* the devil's lusts, the lusts which he would have you to fulfil; you gratify and please him, and comply with his temptation, and are *led captive by him at his will*: nay, you do those lusts which the devil himself fulfils.” Fleshly lusts and worldly lusts the devil tempts men to; but, being a spirit, he cannot fulfil them himself. The peculiar lusts of the devil are *spiritual wickedness*; the lusts of the intellectual powers, and their corrupt reasonings; pride and envy, and wrath and malice; enmity to that which is good, and enticing others to that which is evil; these are lusts which the devil fulfils, and those who are under the dominion of these lusts resemble the devil, as the child does the parent. The more there is of contemplation, and contrivance, and secret complacency, in sin, the more it resembles the *lusts of the devil*.

(2.) You *will do* the devil's lusts. The more there is of the *will* in these lusts, the more there is of the devil in them. When sin is committed *of choice* and not by surprise, with *pleasure* and not with reluctancy, when it is persisted in with a daring presumption and a desperate resolution, like theirs that said, *We have loved strangers and after them we will go*, then the sinner *will do* the devil's lusts. “The lusts of your father you *delight to do*,” so Dr. Hammond; they are rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel.

2. By two particular instances, wherein they manifestly resembled the devil — *murder* and *lying*. The devil is an enemy to life, because God is

the God of life and life is the happiness of man; and an enemy to truth, because God is the God of truth and truth is the bond of human society.

(1.) He was *a murderer from the beginning*, not from his own beginning, for he was created an angel of light, and had a first estate which was pure and good, but from the beginning of his apostasy, which was soon after the creation of man. He was *anthropoktonos* — *homicida*, a man-slayer.

[1.] He was a *hater of man*, and so in affection an disposition a murderer of him. He has his name, *Satan*, from *sitnah* — *hatred*. He maligned God's image upon man, envied his happiness, and earnestly desired his ruin, was an avowed enemy to the whole race.

[2.] He was man's tempter to *that* sin which brought death into the world, and so he was effectually the murderer of all mankind, which in Adam had but *one neck*. He was a murderer of souls, *deceived* them into sin, and by it *slew them* (^{<BIB>}Romans 7:11), poisoned man with the forbidden fruit, and, to aggravate the matter, made him his own murderer. Thus he was not only *at the beginning*, but *from the beginning*, which intimates that thus he *has been* ever since; as he began, so he continues, the murderer of men by his temptations. The great tempter is the great destroyer. The Jews called the devil *the angel of death*.

[3.] He was the first wheel in the first murder that ever was committed by Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, ^{<BIB>}1 John 3:12. If the devil had not been very strong in Cain, he could not have done such an unnatural thing as to kill his own brother. Cain killing his brother by the instigation of the devil, the devil is called the *murderer*, which does not speak Cain's personal guilt the less, but the devil's the more, whose torments, we have reason to think, will be the greater, when the time comes, for all that wickedness into which he has drawn men. See what reason we have to *stand upon our guard against the wiles of the devil*, and never to hearken to him (for he is a murderer, and certainly aims to do us mischief, even when he *speaks fair*), and to wonder that he who is the murderer of the children of men should yet be, by their own consent, so much their master. Now herein these Jews were followers of him, and were murderers, like him; murderers of souls, which they led blindfold into the ditch, and made the *children of hell*; sworn enemies of Christ, and now ready to be his betrayers and murderers, for the same reason that Cain killed Abel. These Jews were that *seed of the serpent* that were to *bruise the heel of the seed of the woman*; *Now you seek to kill me*.

(2.) He was a *liar*. A lie is opposed to truth (^{<172>}1 John 2:21), and accordingly the devil is here described to be,

[1.] An enemy to truth, and therefore to Christ. *First*, He is a *deserter*, from the truth; he *abode not in the truth*, did not continue in the purity and rectitude of his nature wherein he was created, but left his first state; when he degenerated from goodness, he departed from truth, for his apostasy was founded in a lie. The angels were the *hosts of the Lord*; those that fell were not *true* to their commander and sovereign, they were not to be *trusted*, being charged with folly and defection, ^{<183>}Job 4:18. By *the truth* here we may understand the revealed will of God concerning the salvation of man by Jesus Christ, the truth which Christ was now preaching, and which the Jews opposed; herein they did *like their father the devil*, who, *seeing* the honour put upon the human nature in the *first Adam*, and *foreseeing* the much greater honour intended in the *second Adam*, would not be reconciled to that counsel of God, nor *stand in the truth* concerning it, but, from a spirit of pride and envy, set himself to resist it, and to thwart the designs of it; and so did these Jews here, as his children and agents. *Secondly*, He is *destitute* of the truth: *There is no truth in him*. His interest in the world is supported by lies and falsehoods, and there is no truth, nothing you can confide in, in him, nor in any thing he says or does. The notions he propagates concerning good and evil are false and erroneous, his proofs are lying wonders, his temptations are all cheats; he has great knowledge of the truth, but having no affection to it, but on the contrary being a sworn enemy to it, he is said to have *no truth in him*.

[2.] He is a friend and patron of lying: *When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own*. Three things are here said of the devil with reference to the sin of lying: — *First*, That he is a *liar*; his oracles were lying oracles, his prophets lying prophets, and the images in which he was worshipped *teachers of lies*. He tempted our first parents with a downright lie. All his temptations are carried on by lies, calling *evil good and good evil*, and promising impunity in sin; he knows them to be lies, and suggests them with an intention to deceive, and so to destroy. When he now *contradicted* the gospel, in the scribes and Pharisees, it was by lies; and when afterwards he *corrupted it*, in the *man of sin*, it was by strong delusions, and a great complicated lie. *Secondly*, That when he *speaks a lie he speaks of his own*, *ek ton idion*. It is the proper *idiom* of his language; of *his own*, not of God; his Creator never put it into him. When men speak a lie they borrow it from the devil, *Satan fills their hearts to lie* (^{<185>}Acts 5:3); but

when the devil speaks a lie the *model* of it is of his own framing, the motives to it are from himself, which bespeaks the desperate depth of wickedness into which those apostate spirits are sunk; as in their first defection they had no tempter, so their sinfulness is still their own. *Thirdly*, That he is the *father of it*, *autou*.

1. He is the father of every *lie*; not only of the lies which he himself suggests, but of those which others speak; he is the author and founder of all lies. When men speak lies, they speak from him, and as his mouth; they come originally from him, and bear his image.

2. He is the father of every *liar*; so it may be understood. God made men with a disposition to truth. It is congruous to reason and natural light, to the order of our faculties and the laws of society, that we should speak truth; but the devil, the author of sin, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, has so corrupted the nature of man that the wicked are said to be *estranged from the womb, speaking lies* (^{
}Psalm 58:3); he has taught them *with their tongues to use deceit*, ^{
}Romans 3:13. He is the father of liars, who begat them, who trained them up in the *way of lying*, whom they resemble and obey, and with whom all *liars* shall have their portion for ever.

IV. Christ, having thus proved all murderers and all liars to be the devil's children, leaves it to the consciences of his hearers to say, *Thou art the man*. But he comes in the following verses to assist them in the application of it to themselves; he does not call them *liars*, but shows them that they were *no friends to truth*, and therein resembled him who *abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him*. Two things he charges upon them:

1. That they would not *believe the word of truth* (v. 45), *hoti ten aletheian lego, ou pisteuete moi*.

(1.) Two ways it may be taken; —

[1.] “Though I tell you the truth, yet you will not believe me (*hoti*), *that I do so*.” Though he gave abundant proof of his commission from God, and his affection to the children of men, yet they would not believe that he told them the truth. Now was *truth fallen in the street*, ^{
}Isaiah 59:14, 15. The greatest truths with some gained not the least credit; for they *rebelled against the light*, ^{
}Job 24:13. Or,

[2.] *Because I tell you the truth* (so we read it) therefore *you believe me not*. They would not receive him, nor entertain him as a prophet, because he told them some unpleasing truths which they did not care to hear, told them the truth concerning themselves and their own case, showed them their faces in a glass that would not flatter them; therefore they would not believe a word he said. Miserable is the case of those to whom the light of divine truth is become a torment.

(2.) Now, to show them the unreasonableness of their infidelity, he condescends to put the matter to this fair issue, v. 46. He and they being contrary, either he was in an error or they were. Now take it either way.

[1.] If *he* were in an error, why did they not convince him? The falsehood of *pretended* prophets was discovered either by the *ill tendency* of their doctrines (^{<68D>}Deuteronomy 13:2), or by the *ill tenour* of their conversation: *You shall know them by their fruits*; but (saith Christ) *which of you*, you of the sanhedrim, that take upon you to judge of prophets, *which of you convinceth me of sin?* They accused him of some of the worst of crimes — gluttony, drunkenness, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking, confederacy with Satan, and what not. But their accusations were malicious groundless calumnies, and such as every one that knew him knew to be *utterly false*. When they had done their utmost by trick and artifice, subornation and perjury, to prove some crime upon him, the very judge that condemned him owned he *found no fault in him*. The *sin* he here challenges them to convict him of is, *First*, An inconsistent doctrine. They had heard his testimony; could they show any thing in it absurd or unworthy to be believed, any contradiction either of himself or of the scriptures, or any corruption of truth or manners insinuated by his doctrine? ^{<68D>}John 18:20. Or, *Secondly*, An incongruous conversation: “Which of you can justly charge me with any thing, in word or deed, unbecoming a prophet?” See the wonderful condescension of our Lord Jesus, that he demanded not credit any further than the allowed motives of credibility supported his demands. See ^{<24E>}Jeremiah 2:5, 31; ^{<36B>}Micah 6:3. Ministers may hence learn,

1. To *walk so circumspectly* as that it may not be in the power of their most strict observers to convince them of sin, *that the ministry be not blamed*. The only way not to be convicted of sin is not to sin.

2. To be willing to *admit a scrutiny*; though we are confident in many things that we are in the right, yet we should be willing to have it tried whether we be not in the wrong. See ^{<3162>}Job 6:24.

[2.] If *they* were in an error, why were they not convinced by him? “*If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?* If you cannot convince me of error, you must own that *I say the truth*, and why do you not then *give me credit?* Why will you not deal with me upon trust?” Note, If men would but enquire into the reason of their infidelity, and examine why they do not believe that which they cannot gainsay, they would find themselves reduced to such absurdities as they could not but be ashamed of; for it will be found that the reason why we believe not in Jesus Christ is because we are not willing to part with our sins, and deny ourselves, and serve God faithfully; that we are not of the Christian religion, because we would not indeed be of any, and unbelief of our Redeemer resolves itself into a downright rebellion against our Creator.

2. Another thing charged upon them is that they would not hear the words of God (v. 47), which further shows how groundless their claim of relation to God was. Here is,

(1.) A doctrine laid down: *He that is of God heareth God's words*; that is,

[1.] He is *willing* and *ready* to hear them, is sincerely desirous to know what the mind of God is, and cheerfully embraces whatever he knows to be so. God's words have such an authority over, and such an agreeableness with all that are born of God, that they meet them, as the child Samuel did, with, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. Let the word of the Lord come.

[2.] He *apprehends* and *discerns* them, he so hears them as to perceive the *voice of God* in them, which the natural man does not, ^{<414>}1 Corinthians 2:14. He that is of God is *soon aware* of the discoveries he makes of himself of the *nearness of his name* (^{<971>}Psalms 75:1), as they of the family know the master's tread, and the master's knock, and *open to him immediately* (^{<1275>}Luke 12:36), as the sheep know the voice of their shepherd from that of a stranger, ^{<604>}John 10:4, 5; ^{<2118>}Song of Solomon 2:8.

(2.) The application of this doctrine, for the conviction of these unbelieving Jews: *You therefore hear them not*; that is, “You heed not, you understand not, you believe not, the words of God, nor care to hear them, *because you are not of God*. Your being thus deaf and dead to the

words of God is a plain evidence that you are *not of God*.” It is in his word that God manifests himself and is present among us; we are therefore reckoned to be well or ill affected to his word; see ~~4004~~2 Corinthians 4:4; ~~4006~~1 John 4:6. Or, their not being of God was the reason why they did not profitably *hear the words of God*, which Christ spoke; they did not understand and believe him, not because the things themselves were obscure or wanted evidence, but because the hearers were *not of God*, were not born again. If the word of the kingdom do not bring forth fruit, the blame is to be laid upon the soil, not upon the seed, as appears by the parable of the sower, ~~4008~~Matthew 13:3.

~~4008~~ JOHN 8:48-50

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

Here is,

I. The malice of hell breaking out in the base language which the unbelieving Jews gave to our Lord Jesus. Hitherto they had cavilled at his doctrine, and had made invidious remarks upon it; but, having shown themselves uneasy when he complained (v. 43, 47) that they would not hear him, now at length they fall to downright railing, v. 48. They were not the common people, but, as it should seem, the scribes and Pharisees, the men of consequence, who, when they saw themselves convicted of an obstinate infidelity, scornfully turned off the conviction with this: *Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?* See here, see it and wonder, see it and tremble,

1. What was the blasphemous character commonly given of our Lord Jesus among the wicked Jews, to which they refer.

(1.) That he was a Samaritan, that is, that he was an enemy to their church and nation, one that they hated and could not endure. Thus they exposed him to the ill will of the people, with whom you could not put a man into a worse name than to call him *a Samaritan*. If he had been a Samaritan, he had been punishable, by the *beating of the rebels* (as they called it), for coming into the temple. They had often enough called him *a Galilean* — *a mean man*; but as if that were not enough, though it contradicted the other, they will have him a *Samaritan* — *a bad man*. The Jews to this day call

the Christians, in reproach, *Cuthaei — Samaritans*. Note, Great endeavours have in all ages been used to make good people odious by putting them under black characters, and it is easy to run that down with a crowd and a cry which is once put into an ill name. Perhaps because Christ justly inveighed against the pride and tyranny of the priests and elders, they hereby suggest that he aimed at the ruin of their church, in aiming at its reformation, and was *falling away* to the Samaritans.

(2.) That *he had a devil*. Either,

[1.] That he was *in league with the devil*. Having reproached his doctrine as tending to Samaritanism, here they reflect upon his miracles as done in combination with Beelzebub. Or, rather

[2.] That he was possessed with a devil, that he was a melancholy man, whose brain was *clouded*, or a mad man, whose brain was *heated*, and that which he said was no more to be believed than the extravagant rambles of a distracted man, or one in a delirium. Thus the divine revelation of those things which are above the discovery of reason have been often branded with the charge of enthusiasm, and the prophet was called a *mad fellow*, ~~2~~ 2 Kings 9:11; ~~9~~ Hosea 9:7. The inspiration of the Pagan oracles and prophets was indeed a frenzy, and those that had it were for the time beside themselves; but that which was truly *divine* was not so. *Wisdom is justified of her children*, as wisdom indeed.

2. How they undertook to justify this character, and applied it to the present occasion: *Say we not well that thou art so?* One would think that his excellent discourses should have altered their opinion of him, and have made them recant; but, instead of this, their hearts were more hardened and their prejudices confirmed. They value themselves on their enmity to Christ, as if they had never spoken *better* than when they spoke the worst they could of Jesus Christ. Those have arrived at the highest pitch of wickedness who avow their impiety, repeat what they should retract, and justify themselves in that for which they ought to condemn themselves. It is bad to say and do ill, but it is worse to *stand to it*; I do *well to be angry*. When Christ spoke with so much boldness against the sins of the great men, and thereby incensed them against him, those who were sensible of no interest but what is secular and sensual concluded him *beside himself*, for they thought none but a madman would lose his preferment, and hazard his life, for his religion and conscience.

II. The meekness and mercifulness of Heaven shining in Christ's reply to this vile calumny, v. 49, 50.

1. He denies their charge against him: *I have not a devil*; as Paul (⁴⁰⁵Acts 26:25), *I am not mad*. The imputation is unjust; "I am neither actuated by a devil, nor in compact with one;" and this he evidenced by what he did against the devil's kingdom. He takes no notice of their calling him a *Samaritan*, because it was a calumny that disproved itself, it was a personal reflection, and not worth taking notice of: but saying he had a devil reflected on his commission, and therefore he answered that. St. Augustine gives this gloss upon his not saying any thing to their calling him a Samaritan — that he was indeed that good Samaritan spoken of in the parable, ⁴¹³Luke 10:33.

2. He asserts the sincerity of his own intentions: *But I honour my Father*. They suggested that he took undue honours to himself, and derogated from the honour due to God only, both which he *denies* here, in saying that he made it his business to honour his Father, and him only. It also proves that he *had not a devil*; for, if he had, he would not honour God. Note, Those who can truly say that they make it their constant care to honour God are sufficiently armed against the censures and reproaches of men.

3. He complains of the wrong they did him by their calumnies: *You do dishonour me*. By this it appears that, as man, he had a tender sense of the disgrace and indignity done him; reproach was a sword in his bones, and yet he underwent it for our salvation. It is the will of God that *all men should honour the Son*, yet there are many that *dishonour him*; such a contradiction is there in the carnal mind to the will of God. Christ honoured his Father so as never man did, and yet was himself dishonoured so as never man was; for, though God has promised that those who honour him he will honour, he never promised that men should honour them.

4. He clears himself from the imputation of vain glory, in saying this concerning himself, v. 50. See here,

(1.) His *contempt* of worldly honour: *I seek not mine own glory*. He did not aim at this in what he had said of himself or against his persecutors; he did not court the applause of men, nor covet preferment in the world, but industriously declined both. He did not *seek his own glory* distinct from his Father's, nor had any separate interest of his own. For men to *search their own glory* is *not glory* indeed (⁴¹⁵Proverbs 25:27), but rather their

shame to be so much *out in their aim*. This comes in here as a reason why Christ made so light of their reproaches: “*You do dishonour me, but cannot disturb me, shall not disquiet me, for I seek not my own glory.*” Note, Those who are dead to men's praise can safely bear their contempt.

(2.) His *comfort* under worldly dishonour: *There is one that seeketh and judgeth*. In two things Christ made it appear that he *sought not his own glory*; and here he tells us what satisfied him as to both.

[1.] He did not *court* men's respect, but was indifferent to it, and in reference to this he saith, “*There is one that seeketh*, that will secure and advance, my interest in the esteem and affections of the people, while I am in no care about it.” Note, God will seek *their* honour that do not seek *their own*; for before honour is humility.

[2.] He did not *revenge* men's affronts, but was unconcerned at them, and in reference to this he saith, “*There is one that judgeth*, that will vindicate my honour, and severely reckon with those that trample upon it.” Probably he refers here to the judgments that were coming upon the nation of the Jews for the indignities they did to the Lord Jesus. See ¹³⁷³Psalm 37:13-15. *I heard not, for thou wilt hear*. If we undertake to judge for ourselves, whatever damage we sustain, our recompence is in our own hands; but if we be, as we ought to be, humble appellants and patient expectants, we shall find, to our comfort, *there is one that judgeth*.

JOHN 8:51-59

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE PHARISEES

In these verses we have,

I. The doctrine of the immortality of believers laid down, v. 51. It is ushered in with the usual solemn preface, *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, which commands both attention and assent, and this is what he says, *If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death*. Here we have,

1. The *character* of a believer: he is one that *keeps the sayings* of the Lord Jesus, *ton logon ton emon* — *my word*; that *word of mine* which I have delivered to you; this we must not only *receive*, but *keep*; not only *have*, but *hold*. We must keep it in mind and memory, keep it in love and

affection, so keep it as in nothing to violate it or go contrary to it, keep it *without spot* (~~516b~~ 1 Timothy 6:14), keep it as a trust committed to us, keep in it as our way, keep to it as our rule.

2. The *privilege* of a believer: *He shall by no means see death for ever*; so it is in the original. Not as if the bodies of believers were secured from the stroke of death. No, even the *children of the Most High* must *die like men*, and the followers of Christ have been, more than other men, in deaths often, and *killed all the day long*; how then is this promise made good that they *shall not see death*? Answer,

(1.) The property of death is so altered to them that they do not see it as death, they do not see the terror of death, it is quite taken off; their sight does not *terminate* in death, as theirs does who *live by sense*; no, they look so clearly, so comfortably, through death, and beyond death, and are so taken up with their state on the other side death, that they overlook death, and *see it not*.

(2.) The power of death is so broken that though there is no remedy, but they must see *death*, yet they shall not see death *for ever*, shall not be always shut up under its arrests, the day will come when *death shall be swallowed up in victory*.

(3.) They are perfectly delivered from *eternal death*, shall not be *hurt of the second death*. That is the death especially meant here, that death which is *for ever*, which is opposed to everlasting life; this they shall never see, for they shall *never come into condemnation*; they shall have their everlasting lot where there will be *no more death*, where they *cannot die any more*, ~~4216~~ Luke 20:36. Though now they cannot avoid seeing death, and tasting it too, yet they shall shortly be there where it will be *seen no more for ever*, ~~4243~~ Exodus 14:13.

II. The Jews cavil at this doctrine. Instead of laying hold of this precious promise of immortality, which the nature of man has an ambition of (who is there that does not love life, and dread the sight of death?) they lay hold of this occasion to reproach him that makes them so kind an offer: *Now we know that thou hast a devil*. Abraham is dead. Observe here,

1. Their *railing*: “*Now we know that thou hast a devil*, that thou art a madman; thou ravest, and sayest thou knowest not what.” See how these swine trample underfoot the precious pearls of gospel promises. If now at

last they had evidence to prove him *mad*, why did they say (v. 48), before they had that proof, *Thou hast a devil*? But this is the method of malice, first to *fasten* an invidious charge, and then to *fish* for evidence of it: *Now we know that thou hast a devil*. If he had not abundantly proved himself a *teacher come from God*, his promises of immortality to his credulous followers might justly have been ridiculed, and charity itself would have imputed them to a crazed fancy; but his doctrine was evidently divine, his miracles confirmed it, and the Jews' religion taught them to expect such a prophet, and to believe in him; for them therefore thus to reject him was to abandon that promise to which their *twelve tribes hoped to come*, ~~481E~~ Acts 26:7.

2. Their *reasoning*, and the colour they had to *run him down* thus. In short, they look upon him as guilty of an insufferable piece of arrogance, in making himself greater than *Abraham and the prophets: Abraham is dead, and the prophets, they are dead too*; very true, by the same token that these Jews were the genuine offspring of those that killed them. Now,

(1.) It is true that Abraham and the prophets were great men, great in the favour of God, and great in the esteem of all good men.

(2.) It is true that they *kept God's sayings*, and were obedient to them; and yet,

(3.) It is true that they *died*; they never pretended to *have*, much less to *give*, immortality, but every one in his own order was *gathered to his people*. It was their honour that they *died in faith*, but die they must. Why should a good man be afraid to die, when Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead? They have *tracked* the way through that darksome valley, which should reconcile us to death and help to take off the terror of it. Now they think Christ talks madly, when he saith, *If a man keep my sayings, he shall never taste death*. *Tasting death* means the same thing with *seeing* it; and well may death be represented as grievous to *several* of the senses, which is the destruction of them *all*. Now their arguing goes upon two mistakes: —

[1.] They understood Christ of an immortality in this world, and this was a mistake. In the sense that Christ spoke, it was not true that *Abraham and the prophets were dead*, for God is still the *God of Abraham* and the *God of the holy prophets* (~~482E~~ Revelation 22:6); now God is not the God of the

dead, but of the living; therefore Abraham and the prophets are still alive, and, as Christ meant it, they had not *seen* nor *tasted* death.

[2.] They thought none could be greater than Abraham and the prophets, whereas they could not but know that the Messiah would be greater than Abraham or any of the prophets; they did virtuously, but he excelled them all; nay, they borrowed their greatness from him. It was the honour of Abraham that he was the Father of the Messiah, and the honour of the prophets that they testified beforehand concerning him: so that he certainly *obtained a far more excellent name than they*. Therefore, instead of inferring from Christ's making himself greater than Abraham that he had a *devil*, they should have inferred from his proving himself so (by doing the works which neither Abraham nor the prophets ever did) that he was the Christ; but their eyes were blinded. They scornfully asked, *Whom makest thou thyself?* As if he had been guilty of pride and vain-glory; whereas he was so far from making himself greater than he was that he now drew a veil over his own glory, emptied himself, and made himself less than he was, and was the greatest example of humility that ever was.

III. Christ's reply to this cavil; still he vouchsafes to reason with them, that every mouth may be stopped. No doubt he could have struck them dumb or dead upon the spot, but this was the *day of his patience*.

1. In his answer he insists not upon his own testimony concerning himself, but waives it as not sufficient nor conclusive (v. 54): *If I honour myself, my honour is nothing, ~~ean ego doxazo~~ — if I glorify myself*. Note, Self-honour is no honour; and the affectation of glory is both the forfeiture and the defeasance of it: it is *not glory* (~~Proverbs 25:27~~), but so great a reproach that there is no sin which men are more industrious to hide than this; even he that most affects praise would not be thought to do it. Honour of our own creating is a mere chimera, has nothing in it, and therefore is called *vain-glory*. Self-admirers are *self-deceivers*. Our Lord Jesus was not one that *honoured himself*, as they represented him; he was *crowned* by him who is the fountain of honour, and glorified not himself to be made a high priest, ~~Hebrews 5:4, 5~~.

2. He refers himself to *his* Father, God; and to *their* father, Abraham.

(1.) To his Father, *God: It is my Father that honoureth me*. By this he means,

[1.] That he *derived* from his Father all the honour he now claimed; he had commanded them to believe in him, to follow him, and to keep his word, all which put an honour upon him; but it was the Father that *laid help* upon him, that *lodged* all *fulness* in him, that sanctified him, and sealed him, and sent him into the world to receive all the honours due to the Messiah, and this justified him in all these demands of respect.

[2.] That he *depended* upon his Father for all the honour he further *looked for*. He courted not the applauses of the age, but despised them; for his eye and heart were upon the glory which the Father had promised him, and *which he had with the Father before the world was*. He aimed at an advancement with which the Father was to *exalt him, a name* he was to *give him*, ^{<5218>}Philippians 2:8, 9. Note, Christ and all that are his depend upon God for their honour; and he that is sure of honour where he is known cares not though he be slighted where he is in disguise. Appealing thus often to his Father, and his Father's testimony of him, which yet the Jews did not admit nor give credit to,

First, He here takes occasion to show the reason of *their* incredulity, notwithstanding *this* testimony — and this was their *unacquaintedness* with God; as if he had said, “But why should I talk to you of my Father's honouring me, when he is one you know nothing of? You *say of him that he is your God, yet you have not known him.*” Here observe,

a. The profession they made of relation to God: “You say that he is your God, the God you have chosen, and are in covenant with; you say that you are Israel; but all are not so indeed that are of Israel,” ^{<4906>}Romans 9:6. Note, Many pretend to have an interest in God, and say that he is *theirs*, who yet have no just cause to say so. Those who called themselves the *temple of the Lord*, having *profaned the excellency of Jacob*, did but trust in lying words. What will it avail us to say, He is *our God*, if we be not in sincerity *his people*, nor such as he will own? Christ mentions here their profession of relation to God, as that which was an aggravation of their unbelief. All people will honour those whom their God honours; but these Jews, who said that the Lord was their God, studied how to put the utmost disgrace upon one upon whom their God put honour. Note, The Profession we make of a covenant relation to God, and an interest in him, if it be not improved *by us* will be improved *against us*.

b. Their ignorance of him, and estrangement from him, notwithstanding this profession: *Yet you have not known him.*

(a.) *You know him not at all.* These Pharisees were so taken up with the study of their traditions concerning things foreign and trifling that they never minded the most needful and useful knowledge; like the false prophets of old, who *caused people to forget God's name by their dreams,* ^{<227>}Jeremiah 23:27. Or,

(b.) *You know him not aright,* but mistake concerning him; and this is as bad as not knowing him at all, or worse. Men may be able to dispute subtly concerning God, and yet may think him such a one as themselves, and *not know him.* You say that he is *yours,* and it is natural to us to desire to know *our own,* yet you *know him not.* Note, There are many who *claim-kindred* to God who yet have no acquaintance with him. It is only the name of God which they have learned to talk of, and to hector with; but for the nature of God, his attributes and perfections, and relations to his creatures, they know nothing of the matter; we *speak this to their shame,* ^{<454>}1 Corinthians 15:34. Multitudes satisfy themselves, but deceive themselves, with a titular relation to an *unknown God.* This Christ charges upon the Jews here,

[a.] To show how vain and groundless their pretensions of relation to God were. “You say that he is yours, but you give yourselves the lie, for it is plain that you do not know him;” and we reckon that a cheat is effectually convicted if it be found that he is ignorant of the persons he pretends alliance to.

[b.] To show the true reason why they were not wrought upon by Christ's doctrine and miracles. They knew not God; and therefore perceived not the image of God, nor the voice of God in Christ. Note, The reason why men receive not the *gospel of Christ* is because they have not the *knowledge of God.* Men *submit not to the righteousness of Christ* because they are *ignorant of God's righteousness,* ^{<508>}Romans 10:3. They that know not God, and obey not the gospel of Christ, are put together, ^{<508>}2 Thessalonians 1:8.

Secondly, He gives them the reason of *his* assurance that his Father would *honour him and own him: But I know him;* and again, *I know him;* which bespeaks, not only his *acquaintance* with him, having lain in his bosom, but his *confidence* in him, to stand by him, and bear him out in his whole undertaking; as was prophesied concerning him (^{<280>}Isaiah 50:7, 8), *I know that I shall not be ashamed,* for he is near that justifies; and as Paul, “*I*

know whom I have believed (⁵¹¹²2 Timothy 1:12), I know him to be faithful, and powerful, and heartily engaged in the cause which I know to be his own." Observe,

1. How he *professes* his knowledge of his Father, with the greatest certainty, as one that was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it: *If I should say I know him not, I should be a liar like unto you.* He would not deny his relation to God, to humour the Jews, and to avoid their reproaches, and prevent further trouble; nor would he retract what he had said, nor confess himself either deceived or a deceiver; if he should, he would be found a false witness against God and himself. Note, Those who disown their religion and relation to God, as Peter, are liars, as much as hypocrites are, who pretend to know him, when they do not. See ⁵⁴⁹³1 Timothy 6:13, 14. Mr Clark observes well, upon this, that it is a great sin to deny God's grace in us.

2. How he *proves* his knowledge of his Father: *I know him and keep his sayings, or his word.* Christ, as man, was obedient to the moral law, and, as Redeemer, to the mediatorial law; and in both he kept *his Father's word, and his own word* with the Father. Christ requires of us (v. 51) that we *keep his sayings*; and he has set before us a copy of obedience, a copy without a blot: he *kept his Father's sayings*; well might he who *learned obedience* teach it; see ³⁸⁰⁸Hebrews 5:8, 9. Christ by this evinced that he knew the Father. Note, The best proof of our acquaintance with God is our obedience to him. Those only know God aright that keep his word; it is a ruled case, ⁶²⁰⁵1 John 2:3. *Hereby we know that we know him* (and do not only fancy it), *if we keep his commandments.*

(2.) Christ refers them to *their* father, whom they boasted so much of a relation to, and that was Abraham, and this closes the discourse.

[1.] Christ asserts Abraham's prospect of him, and respect to him: *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad*, v. 56. And by this he proves that he was not at all out of the way when he *made himself greater than Abraham.* Two things he here speaks of as instances of that patriarch's respect to the promised Messiah: —

First, The ambition he had to *see his day*: *He rejoiced, egalliaisto* — *he leaped at it.* The word, though it commonly signifies *rejoicing*, must here signify a transport of *desire* rather than of *joy*, for otherwise the latter part

of the verse would be a tautology; he *saw it, and was glad*. He *reached out*, or *stretched himself forth*, that he might *see my day*; as Zaccheus, that ran before, and climbed the tree, *to see Jesus*. The notices he had received of the Messiah to come had raised in him an expectation of something *great*, which he earnestly longed to know more of. The dark intimation of that which is considerable puts men upon enquiry, and makes them earnestly ask *Who?* and *What?* and *Where?* and *When?* and *How?* And thus the prophets of the Old Testament, having a general idea of a grace that should *come*, *searched diligently* (~~1~~ 1 Peter 1:10), and Abraham was as industrious herein as any of them. God told him of a land that he would give his posterity, and of the wealth and honour he designed them (~~154~~ Genesis 15:14); but he never *leaped* thus to see that day, as he did to see the day of the Son of man. He could not look with so much indifferency upon the promised *seed* as he did upon the promised land; *in that* he was, but *to the other* he could not be, contentedly a stranger. Note, Those who rightly know any thing of Christ cannot but be earnestly desirous to know more of him. Those who discern the dawning of the light of the Sun of righteousness cannot but wish to see his rising. The mystery of redemption is that which *angels desire to look into*, much more should we, who are more immediately concerned in it. Abraham desired to see Christ's day, though it was at a great distance; but this degenerate seed of his discerned not his day, nor bade it welcome when it came. The appearing of Christ, which gracious souls love and long for, carnal hearts dread and loathe.

Secondly, The satisfaction he had in what he did see of it: *He saw it, and was glad*. Observe here,

a. How God gratified the pious desire of Abraham; he longed to see Christ's day, and he *saw it*. Though he saw it not so plainly, and fully, and distinctly as we now see it under the gospel, yet he saw something of it, more *afterwards* than he did at first. Note, To him that has, and to him that asks, shall be given; to him that uses and improves what he has, and that desires and prays for more of the knowledge of Christ, God will give more. But how did Abraham see Christ's day?

(a.) Some understand it of the sight he had of it in the other world. The separate soul of Abraham, when the veil of flesh was rent, saw the mysteries of the kingdom of God in heaven. Calvin mentions this sense of it, and does not much disallow it. Note, The longings of

gracious souls after Jesus Christ will be fully satisfied when they come to heaven, and not till then. But,

(b.) It is more commonly understood of some sight he had of *Christ's day* in this world. They that *received not the promises, yet saw them afar off*, ^{<8113>}Hebrews 11:13. Balaam saw Christ, but not *now*, not *nigh*. There is room to conjecture that Abraham had some vision of Christ and his day, for his own private satisfaction, which is not, nor must be, recorded in his story, like that of Daniel's, which must be *shut up, and sealed unto the time of the end*, ^{<27104>}Daniel 12:4. Christ knew what Abraham saw better than Moses did. But there are divers things recorded in which Abraham saw more of that which he longed to see than he did when the promise was first made to him. He saw in Melchizedek one *made like unto the Son of God*, and a priest for ever; he saw an appearance of Jehovah, attended with two angels, in the plains of Mamre. In the prevalency of his intercession for Sodom he saw a specimen of Christ's intercession; in the casting out of Ishmael, and the establishment of the covenant with Isaac, he saw a figure of the gospel day, which is Christ's day; for these things were an allegory. In offering Isaac, and the ram instead of Isaac, he saw a double type of the great sacrifice; and his calling the place *Jehovah-jireh* — *It shall be seen*, intimates that he saw something more in it than others did, which time would produce; and in making his servant *put his hand under his thigh*, when he swore, he had a regard to the Messiah.

b. How *Abraham* entertained these discoveries of Christ's day, and bade them welcome: *He saw, and was glad*. He was glad of what he *saw* of God's favour to himself, and glad of what he *foresaw* of the mercy God had in store for the world. Perhaps this refers to Abraham's laughing when God assured him of a son by Sarah (^{<4176>}Genesis 17:16, 17), for that was not a laughter of distrust as Sarah's but of joy; in that promise he saw Christ's day, and it *filled him with joy unspeakable*. Thus he embraced the promises. Note, A believing sight of Christ and his day will put gladness into the heart. No joy like the joy of faith; we are never acquainted with true pleasure till we are acquainted with Christ.

[2.] The Jews cavil at this, and reproach him for it (v. 57): *Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* Here, *First*, They suppose that if Abraham saw him and his day he also had seen Abraham, which yet was not a necessary *innuendo*, but this turn of his words would best serve

to expose him; yet it was true that Christ had seen Abraham, and had talked with him as a man talks with his friend. *Secondly*, They suppose it a very absurd thing for him to pretend to have seen Abraham, who was *dead* so many ages before he was born. The state of the dead is an *invisible* state; but here they ran upon the old mistake, understanding that corporally which Christ spoke spiritually. Now this gave them occasion to *despise his youth*, and to upbraid him with it, as if he were *but of yesterday, and knew nothing: Thou art not yet fifty years old*. They might as well have said, *Thou art not forty*; for he was now but thirty-two or thirty-three years old. As to this, Irenaeus, one of the first fathers, with this passage supports the tradition which he says he had from some that had conversed with St. John, that our Saviour lived to be fifty years old, which he contends for, *Advers. Haeres. lib. 2, cap. 39, 40*. See what little credit is to be given to tradition; and, as to this here, the Jews spoke *at random*; some year they would mention, and therefore pitched upon one that they thought he was far enough short of; he did not look to be forty, but they were sure he could not be fifty, much less contemporary with Abraham. Old age is reckoned to begin at fifty (^{<0047>}Numbers 4:47), so that they meant no more than this, “Thou art not to be reckoned an old man; many of us are much thy seniors, and yet pretend not to have seen Abraham.” Some think that his countenance was so altered, with grief and watching, that, together with the gravity of his aspect, it made him look like a man of fifty years old: *his visage was so marred*, ^{<2514>}Isaiah 52:14.

[3.] Our Saviour gives an effectual answer to this cavil, by a solemn assertion of his own seniority even to Abraham himself (v. 58): “*Verily, verily, I say unto you; I do not only say it in private to my own disciples, who will be sure to say as I say, but to you my enemies and persecutors; I say it to your faces, take it how you will: Before Abraham was, I am;*” *prin Abraam genesthai, ego eimi, Before Abraham was made or born, I am*. The change of the word is observable, and bespeaks Abraham a creature, and himself the Creator; well therefore might he make himself *greater* than Abraham. *Before Abraham he was, First, As God. I am*, is the name of God (^{<0014>}Exodus 3:14); it denotes his self-existence; he does not say, *I was*, but *I am*, for he is the first and the last, immutably the same (^{<0018>}Revelation 1:8); thus he was not only before Abraham, but before *all worlds*, ^{<0011>}John 1:1; ^{<0023>}Proverbs 8:23. *Secondly, As Mediator*. He was the appointed Messiah, long before Abraham; the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world* (^{<0013>}Revelation 13:8), the channel of conveyance

of light, life, and love from God to man. This supposes his divine nature, that he is the same in himself from eternity (³⁸¹⁸ Hebrews 13:8), and that he is the same to man ever since the fall; he was made of God wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to Adam, and Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Shem, and all the patriarchs that lived and died by faith in him before Abraham was born. Abraham was the root of the Jewish nation, the rock out of which they were hewn. If Christ was before Abraham, his doctrine and religion were no novelty, but were, in the substance of them, prior to Judaism, and ought to take place of it.

[4.] This great word ended the dispute *abruptly*, and put a period to it: they could bear to hear no more from him, and he needed to say no more to them, having witnessed this good confession, which was sufficient to support all his claims. One would think that Christ's discourse, in which shone so much both of grace and glory, should have captivated them all; but their inveterate prejudice against the holy spiritual doctrine and law of Christ, which were so contrary to their pride and worldliness, baffled all the methods of conviction. Now was fulfilled that prophecy (^{391E} Malachi 3:1, 2), that when the messenger of the covenant should *come to his temple they would not abide the day of his coming*, because he would be *like a refiner's fire*. Observe here,

First, How they were *enraged* at Christ for what he said: *They took up stones to cast at him*, v. 59. Perhaps they looked upon him as a blasphemer, and such were indeed to be stoned (⁴⁰¹⁶ Leviticus 24:16); but they must be first legally tried and convicted. Farewell justice and order if every man pretend to execute a law at his pleasure. Besides, they had said but just now that he was a distracted crack-brained man, and if so it was against all reason and equity to punish him as a malefactor for what he said. *They took up stones*. Dr. Lightfoot will tell you how they came to have stones so ready in the temple; they had workmen at this time repairing the temple, or making some additions, and the pieces of stone which they hewed off served for this purpose. See here the desperate power of sin and Satan in and over the children of disobedience. Who would think that ever there should be such wickedness as this in men, such an open and daring rebellion against one that undeniably proved himself to be the Son of God? Thus every one has a stone to throw at his holy religion, ⁴¹²² Acts 28:22.

Secondly, How he made his *escape* out of their hands.

1. He *absconded*; Jesus *hid himself*; *ekrybe* — *he was hid*, either by the crowd of those that wished well to him, to shelter him (he that ought to have been upon a throne, high and lifted up, is content to be *lost in a crowd*); or perhaps he concealed himself behind some of the walls or pillars of the temple (*in the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me*, ^{<127>}Psalm 27:5); or by a divine power, casting a mist before their eyes, he made himself invisible to them. *When the wicked rise a man is hidden*, a wise and good man, ^{<182>}Proverbs 28:12, 28. Not that Christ was afraid or ashamed to stand by what he had said, but his *hour was not yet come*, and he would countenance the flight of his ministers and people in times of persecution, when they are called to it. The Lord hid Jeremiah and Baruch, ^{<245>}Jeremiah 36:26.

2. He *departed*, he *went out of the temple*, going *through the midst of them*, undiscovered, and *so passed by*. This was not a cowardly inglorious flight, nor such as argued either guilt or fear. It was foretold concerning him that he should not fail nor be discouraged, ^{<244>}Isaiah 42:4. But,

(1.) It was an instance of his power over his enemies, and that they could do no more against him than he gave them leave to do; by which it appears that when afterwards he was taken in their pits he *offered himself*, ^{<405>}John 10:18. They now thought they had made sure of him and yet he *passed through the midst* of them, either their eyes being blinded or their hands tied, and thus he left them to fume, like a lion *disappointed of his prey*.

(2.) It was an instance of his prudent provision for his own safety, when he knew that his work was not done, nor his testimony finished; thus he gave an example to his own rule, *When they persecute you in one city flee to another*; nay, if occasion be, to a *wilderness*, for so Elijah did (^{<118>}1 Kings 19:3, 4), and the woman, the church, ^{<616>}Revelation 12:6. When they took up loose stones to throw at Christ, he could have commanded the fixed stones, which did *cry out of the wall* against them, to avenge his cause, or the earth to open and swallow them up; but he chose to accommodate himself to the state he was in, to make the example imitable by the prudence of his followers, without a miracle.

(3.) It was a righteous deserting of those who (worse than the Gadarenes, who *prayed him to depart*) stoned him from among them.

Christ will not long stay with those who bid him be gone. Christ did again visit the temple after this; as one *loth to depart*, he *bade oft farewell*; but at last he abandoned it for ever, and left it *desolate*. Christ now *went through* the midst of the Jews, and none of them courted his stay, nor stirred up himself to take hold of him, but were even content to let him go. Note, God never forsakes any till they have first provoked him to withdraw, and will have none of him. Calvin observes that these chief priests, when they had driven Christ out of the temple, valued themselves on the possession they kept of it: “But,” says he, “those deceive themselves who are proud of a church or temple which Christ has forsaken.” *Longe falluntur, cum templum se habere putant Deo vacuum*. When Christ left them it is said that he passed by silently and unobserved; *paregen houtos*, so that they were not aware of him. Note, Christ's departures from a church, or a particular soul, are often *secret*, and not soon taken notice of. As *the kingdom of God comes not, so it goes not, with observation*. See ~~(76)~~ Judges 16:20. *Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him*. Thus it was with these forsaken Jews, God left them, and they never missed him.