

CHAPTER 9

After Christ's departure out of the temple, in the close of the foregoing chapter, and before this happened which is recorded in this chapter, he had been for some time abroad in the country, it is supposed about two or three months; in which interval of time Dr. Lightfoot and other harmonists place all the passages that occur from ~~<Q17>~~Luke 10:17 to 13:17. What is recorded in John 7 and 8 was at the feast of tabernacles, in September; what is recorded in this and the following chapter was at the feast of dedication in December, ~~<Q12>~~John 10:22. Mr. Clark and others place this immediately after the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we have,

- I. The miraculous cure of a man that was born blind (v. 1-7).
- II. The discourses which were occasioned by it.
 1. A discourse of the neighbours among themselves, and with the man (v. 8-12).
 2. Between the Pharisees and the man (v. 13-34).
 3. Between Christ and the poor man (v. 35-38).
 4. Between Christ and the Pharisees (v. 39 to the end).

~~<Q11>~~ JOHN 9:1-7

SIGHT GIVEN TO ONE BORN BLIND

We have here sight given to a poor beggar that had been blind from his birth. Observe,

I. The notice which our Lord Jesus took of the piteous case of this poor blind man (v. 1): *As Jesus passed by he saw a man which was blind from his birth.* The first words seem to refer to the last of the foregoing chapter, and countenance the opinion of those who in the harmony place this story immediately after that. There it was said, *paregen* — *he passed by*, and here, without so much as repeating his name (though our translators supply it) *kai parago* — *and as he passed by.*

1. Though the Jews had so basely abused him, both by word and deed gave him the highest provocation imaginable, yet he did not miss any opportunity of doing good among them, nor take up a resolution, as justly he might have done, never to have favoured them with any good offices. The cure of this blind man was a kindness to *the public*, enabling him to work for his living who before was a charge and burden to the neighbourhood. It is noble, and generous, and Christ-like, to be willing to *serve the public*, even when we are slighted and disobliged by them, or think ourselves so. Though he was in his flight from a threatening danger, and escaping for his life, yet he willingly halted and staid awhile to show mercy to this poor man. We make more haste than good speed when we out-run opportunities of doing good.

3. When the Pharisees drove Christ from them, he went to this poor blind beggar. Some of the ancients make this a figure of the bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles, *who sat in darkness*, when the Jews had rejected it, and driven it from them.

4. Christ took this poor blind man in his way, and cured him *in transitu* — *as he passed by*. Thus should we take occasions of doing good, even as we *pass by*, wherever we are.

Now,

(1.) The condition of this poor man was very sad. He was *blind*, and had been so *from his birth*. If the light is sweet, how melancholy must it needs be for a man, all his days, *to eat in darkness!* He that is *blind* has no *enjoyment* of the light, but he that is *born blind* has no *idea* of it. Methinks such a one would give a great deal to have his curiosity satisfied with but one day's sight of light and colours, shapes and figures, though he were never to see them more. *Why is the light of life given to one that is in this misery*, that is deprived of the light of the sun, *whose way is thus hid, and whom God hath thus hedged in?* ^{<K&R>} Job 3:20-23. Let us bless God that it was not our case. The eye is one of the most curious parts of the body, its structure exceedingly nice and fine. In the formation of animals, it is said to be the first part that appears distinctly discernible. What a mercy is it that there was no miscarriage in the making of ours! Christ cured many that were blind by disease or accident, but here he cured one that was *born blind*.

[1.] That he might give an instance of his power to help in the most desperate cases, and to relieve when none else can.

[2.] That he might give a *specimen* of the work of his grace upon the souls of sinners, which gives sight to those that were by nature blind.

(2.) The compassions of our Lord Jesus towards him were very tender. He *saw him*; that is, he took cognizance of his case, and looked upon him with concern. When God is about to work deliverance, he is said to see *the affliction*; so Christ saw this poor man. Others saw him, but not as he did. This poor man could not see Christ, but Christ saw him, and anticipated both his prayers and expectations with a surprising cure. Christ is often found of those that seek him not, nor see him, ^{<381>}Isaiah 65:1. And, if we know or apprehend any thing of Christ, it is because we were first *known of him* (^{<380>}Galatians 4:9) and *apprehended* by him, ^{<382>}Philippians 3:12.

II. The discourse between Christ and his disciples concerning this man. When he *departed out of the temple* they went along with him: for these were they that *continued with him in his temptations*, and followed him whithersoever he went; and they lost nothing by their adherence to him, but gained experience abundantly. Observe,

1. The question which the disciples put to their Master upon this blind man's case, v. 2. When Christ looked upon him, they had an eye to him too; Christ's compassion should kindle ours. It is probable that Christ told them this poor man was born blind, or they knew it by common fame; but they did not move Christ to heal him. Instead of this, they started a very odd question concerning him: *Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* Now this question of theirs was,

(1.) *Uncharitably censorious*. They take it for granted that this extraordinary calamity was the punishment of some uncommon wickedness, and that this man was a sinner above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem, ^{<383>}Luke 13:4. For the *barbarous people* to infer, *Surely this man is a murderer*, was not so strange; but it was *inexcusable* in them, who knew the scriptures, who had read that *all things come alike to all*, and knew that it was adjudged in Job's case that the greatest sufferers are not *therefore* to be looked upon as the greatest sinners. The grace of repentance calls our own afflictions *punishments*, but the grace of charity calls the afflictions of others *trials*, unless the contrary is very evident.

(2.) It was *unnecessarily curious*. Concluding this calamity to be inflicted for some very heinous crime, they ask, *Who were the criminals, this man or his parents?* And what was this to them? Or what good would it do them to know it? We are apt to be more inquisitive concerning other people's sins than concerning our own; whereas, it is more our concern to know wherefore God contends with us than wherefore he contends with others; for to judge ourselves is our sin. They enquire,

[1.] Whether this man was punished thus for some sin of his own, either committed or foreseen before his birth. Some think that the disciples were tainted with the Pythagorean notion of the *pre-existence* of souls, and their *transmigration* from one body to another. Was this man's soul condemned to the dungeon of this blind body to punish it for some great sin committed in another body which it had before animated? The Pharisees seem to have had the same opinion of his case when they said, *Thou wast altogether born in sin* (v. 34), as if all those, and those only, were born in sin whom nature had *stigmatized*. Or,

[2.] Whether he was punished for the wickedness of his parents, which God sometimes *visits upon the children*. It is a good reason why parents should take heed of sin, lest their children smart for it when they are gone. Let not us thus be cruel to our own, as the *ostrich in the wilderness*. Perhaps the disciples asked this, not as believing that this was the punishment of some actual sin of his own or his parents, but Christ having intimated to another patient that his sin was the cause of this impotency (~~John~~ John 5:14), "Master," say they, "whose sin is the cause of this impotency?" Being at a loss what construction to put upon this providence, they desire to be informed. The equity of God's dispensations is always certain, for *his righteousness is as the great mountains*, but not always to be accounted for, for his *judgments are a great deep*.

2. Christ's answer to this question. He was always *apt to teach*, and to rectify his disciples' mistakes.

(1.) He gives the reason of this poor man's blindness: "*Neither has this man sinned nor his parents*, but he was born blind, and has continued so to this day, that now at last *the works of God should be made manifest in him*," v. 3. Here Christ, who perfectly knew the secret springs of the divine counsels, told them two things concerning such uncommon calamities: —

[1.] That they are not always inflicted as punishments of sin. The sinfulness of the whole race of mankind does indeed justify God in all the miseries of human life; so that those who have the least share of them must say that God is *kind*, and those who have the largest share must not say that he is *unjust*; but many are made much more *miserable* than others in this life who are not at all more *sinful*. Not but that this man was a sinner, and his parents sinners, but it was not any uncommon guilt that God had an eye to in inflicting this upon him. Note, We must take heed of judging any to be great sinners merely because they are great sufferers, lest we be found, not only *persecuting those whom God has smitten* (⁴⁸⁸Psalm 69:26), but accusing those whom he has justified, and *condemning those for whom Christ died*, which is daring and dangerous, ⁴⁸⁸Romans 8:33, 34.

[2.] That they are sometimes intended purely *for the glory of God*, and the *manifesting of his works*. God has a sovereignty over all his creatures and an exclusive right in them, and may make them serviceable to his glory in such a way as he thinks fit, in doing or suffering; and if God be glorified, either by us or in us, we were not made *in vain*. This man was *born blind*, and it was worth while for him to be so, and to continue thus long dark, *that the works of God might be manifest in him*. That is, *First*, That the *attributes of God* might be made manifest in him: his justice in making sinful man liable to such grievous calamities; his ordinary power and goodness in supporting a poor man under such a grievous and tedious affliction, especially that his extraordinary power and goodness might be manifested in curing him. Note, The difficulties of providence, otherwise unaccountable, may be resolved into this — God intends in them to *show himself*, to declare his glory, to make himself to be taken notice of. Those who regard him not in the ordinary course of things are sometimes alarmed by things extraordinary. How contentedly then may a good man be a *loser in his comforts*, while he is sure that thereby God will be one way or other a *gainer in his glory*! *Secondly*, That the counsels of God concerning the Redeemer might be manifested in him. He was *born blind* that our Lord Jesus might have the honour of *curing him*, and might therein prove himself sent of God to be the true light to the world. Thus the fall of man was permitted, and the *blindness* that followed it, that the works of God might be manifest in *opening the eyes of the blind*. It was now a great while since this man was born blind, and yet it never appeared till now *why* he was so. Note, The intentions of Providence commonly do

not appear till a great while after the event, perhaps *many years* after. The sentences in the book of providence are sometimes *long*, and you must read a great way before you can apprehend the sense of them.

(2.) He gives the reason of his own forwardness and readiness to help and heal him, v. 4, 5. It was not for ostentation, but in pursuance of his undertaking: *I must work the works of him that sent me* (of which this is one), *while it is day*, and working time; *the night cometh*, the period of that day, *when no man can work*. This is not only a reason why Christ was constant in doing good to the souls and bodies of men, but why particularly he did this, though it was the sabbath day, on which works of necessity might be done, and he proves this to be a work of necessity.

[1.] It was his Father's will: *I must work the works of him that sent me*. Note, *First*, The Father, when he sent his Son into the world, gave him *work to do*; he did not come into the world to take state, but to do business; whom God sends he employs, for he sends none to be idle. *Secondly*, The works Christ had to do were the *works of him that sent him*, not only appointed *by him*, but done *for him*; he was a worker together with God. *Thirdly*, He was pleased to lay himself under the strongest obligations to do the business he was sent about: *I must work*. He *engaged his heart*, in the covenant of redemption, to *draw near*, and *approach* to God as Mediator, ²⁴¹²Jeremiah 30:21. Shall we be willing to be *loose*, when Christ was willing to be *bound*? *Fourthly*, Christ, having laid himself under obligations to do his work, laid out himself with the utmost vigour and industry in his work. He *worked the works* he had to do; did *ergazesthai ta erga* — *made a business of that which was his business*. It is not enough to look at our work, and talk over it, but we must work it.

[2.] Now was his opportunity: *I must work while it is day*, while the time lasts which is appointed to work in, and while the light lasts which is given to work by. Christ himself had *his day*. *First*, All the business of the *mediatorial kingdom* was to be done within the limits of time, and in this world; for at the end of the world, when time shall be no more, the *kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father*, and the *mystery of God finished*. *Secondly*, all the work he had to do *in his own person* here on earth was to be done *before his death*; the time of his living in this world is *the day* here spoken of. Note, The time of our life is our day, in which it concerns us to do the *work of the day*. Day-time is the proper season for work (²⁴¹²Psalm 104:22, 23); during the day of life we must be

busy, not waste *day-time*, nor play by *day-light*; it will be time enough to rest when our day is done, for it is *but a day*.

[3.] The period of his opportunity was at hand, and therefore he would be busy; *The night comes when no man can work*. Note, The consideration of our death approaching should quicken us to improve all the opportunities of life, both for doing and getting good. *The night comes*, it will come certainly, may come suddenly, is coming nearer and nearer. We cannot compute how nigh our sun is, it may go down at noon; nor can we promise ourselves a twilight between the day of life and the night of death. When the night comes we *cannot work*, because the light afforded us to work by is *extinguished*; the grave is a land of darkness, and our work cannot be done *in the dark*. And, besides, our time allotted us for our work will then have *expired*; when our Master tied us to duty he tied us to time too; when night comes, *call the labourers*; we must then *show our work*, and receive according to the things done. In the world of retribution we are no longer probationers; it is too late to *bid* when the inch of candle is *dropped*. Christ uses this as an argument with himself to be diligent, though he had no opposition from within to struggle with; much more need have we to work upon our hearts these and the like considerations to quicken us.

[4.] His business in the world was to enlighten it (v. 5): *As long as I am in the world*, and that will not be long, *I am the light of the world*. He had said this before, ^{<RR2>}John 8:12. He is the *Sun of righteousness*, that has not only light in his wings for those that can see, but healing in his wings, or beams, for those that are blind and cannot see, therein far exceeding in virtue that great light which rules *by day*. Christ would cure this blind man, the representative of a blind world, because he came to be *the light of the world*, not only to give *light*, but to give *sight*. Now this gives us, *First*, A great *encouragement* to come to him, as a guiding, quickening, refreshing light. To whom should we look but to him? Which way should we turn our eyes, but to the light? We partake of the sun's light, and so we may of Christ's grace, without money and without price. *Secondly*, A good *example* of usefulness in the world. What Christ saith of himself, he saith of his disciples: *You are lights in the world*, and, if so, *Let your light shine*. What were candles made for but to burn?

III. The manner of the cure of the blind man, v. 6, 7. The circumstances of the miracle are singular, and no doubt significant. *When he had thus spoken* for the instruction of his disciples, and the opening of their

understandings, he addressed himself to the opening of the blind man's eyes. He did not defer it till he could do it either more privately, for his greater safety, or more publicly, for his greater honour, or till the sabbath was past, when it would give less offence. What good we have opportunity of doing we should do quickly; he that will never do a good work till there is nothing to be objected against it will leave many a good work for ever undone, ²¹¹⁰⁴Ecclesiastes 11:4. In the cure observe,

1. The preparation of the eye-salve. Christ *spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle*. He could have cured him with a word, as he did others, but he chose to do it in this way to show that he is not *tied* to any method. He made clay of his own spittle, because there was no water near; and he would teach us not to be nice or curious, but, when we have at any time occasion, to be willing to take up with that which is *next hand*, if it will but serve the turn. Why should we *go about* for that which may as well be had and done a *nearer way*? Christ's making use of his own spittle intimates that there is healing virtue in every thing that belongs to Christ; clay made of Christ's spittle was much more precious than the balm of Gilead.

2. The application of it to the place: *He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay*. Or, as the margin reads it, *He spread (epechrise), he daubed the clay upon the eyes of the blind man*, like a tender physician; he did it himself with his own hand, though the patient was a beggar. Now Christ did this,

(1.) To magnify his power in making a blind man to see by that method which one would think more likely to make a seeing man blind. Daubing clay on the eyes would *close them* up, but never *open them*. Note, The power of God often works by contraries; and he makes men feel their own blindness before he gives them sight.

(2.) To give an intimation that it was his mighty hand, the very same that at first made man out of *the clay*; for by him God *made the worlds*, both the great world, and man the little world. Man was *formed out of the clay*, and moulded like the clay, and here Christ used the same materials to give sight to the body that at first he used to give being to it.

(3.) To represent and typify the healing and opening of the eyes of the mind by the grace of Jesus Christ. The design of the gospel is to *open men's eyes*, ⁴⁴⁸³Acts 26:18. Now the eye-salve that does the work is of

Christ's preparing; it is made up, not as this, of his spittle, but of his blood, the blood and water that came out of his pierced side; we must come to Christ for *the eye-salve*, ^{<418>}Revelation 3:18. He only is *able*, and he only is *appointed*, to make it up, ^{<418>}Luke 4:18. The means used in this work are very weak and unlikely, and are made effectual only by the power of Christ; when a dark world was to be enlightened, and nations of blind souls were to have their eyes opened, God chose the *foolish things, and weak, and despised*, for the doing of it. And the method Christ takes is first to make men feel themselves blind, as this poor man did whose eyes were daubed with clay, and then to give them sight. Paul in his conversion was *struck blind* for three days, and then the *scales fell from his eyes*. The way prescribed for getting spiritual wisdom is, *Let a man become a fool, that he may be wise*, ^{<418>}1 Corinthians 3:18. We must be made uneasy with our blindness, as this man here, and then healed.

3. The directions given to the patient, v. 7. His physician said to him, *Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*. Not that this washing was needful to effect the cure; but,

(1.) Christ would hereby try his obedience, and whether he would with an implicit faith obey the orders of one he was so much a stranger to.

(2.) He would likewise try how he stood affected to the tradition of the elders, which taught, and perhaps had taught him (for many that are *blind* are very knowing), that it was not lawful to wash the eyes, no not with spittle medicinally, on the sabbath day, much less to go to a pool of water to wash them.

(3.) He would hereby represent the method of spiritual healing, in which, though the effect is owing purely to his power and grace, there is duty to be done by us. Go, search the scriptures, attend upon the ministry, converse with the wise; this is like washing in the pool of Siloam. Promised graces must be expected in the way of instituted ordinances. The waters of baptism were to those who had been trained up in darkness like the pool of Siloam, in which they might not only wash and be clean, but *wash, and have their eyes opened*. Hence they that were baptized are said to be *photisthentes* — *enlightened*; and the ancients called baptism *photismos* — *illumination*. Concerning the pool of Siloam observe,

[1.] That it was supplied with water from mount Zion, so that these were the *waters of the sanctuary* (^{<348>}Psalm 46:4), living waters, which were *healing*, ^{<349>}Ezekiel 47:9.

[2.] That the waters of Siloam had of old signified the throne and kingdom of the house of David, pointing at the Messiah (^{<386>}Isaiah 8:6), and the Jews who *refused the waters of Shiloa*, Christ's doctrine and law, and rejoiced in the tradition of the elders. Christ would try this man, whether he would cleave to the waters of Siloam or no.

[3.] The evangelist takes notice of the signification of the name, its being interpreted *sent*. Christ is often called the *sent of God*, the Messenger of the covenant (^{<391>}Malachi 3:1); so that when Christ sent him to the pool of Siloam he did in effect send him to himself; for Christ is *all in all* to the healing of souls. Christ as a prophet directs us to himself as a priest. *Go, wash in the fountain opened*, a fountain of life, not a *pool*.

4. The patient's obedience to these directions: *He went his way therefore*, probably led by some friend or other; or perhaps he was so well acquainted with Jerusalem that he could find the way himself. Nature often supplies the want of sight with an uncommon sagacity; and *he washed his eyes*; probably the disciples, or some stander by, informed him that he who bade him do it was that Jesus whom he had heard so much of, else he would not have gone, at his bidding, on that which looked so much like a fool's errand; in confidence of Christ's power, as well as in obedience to his command, he went, and washed.

5. The cure effected: *He came seeing*. There is more glory in this concise narrative, *He went and washed, and came seeing*, than in Caesar's *Veni, vidi, vici* — *I came, I saw, I conquered*. When the clay was *washed off* from his eyes, all the other impediments were removed with it; so when the pangs and struggles of the new birth are over, and the pains and terrors of conviction past, the bands of sin fly off with them, and a glorious light and liberty succeed. See here an instance,

(1.) Of the power of Christ. What cannot *he* do who could not only do *this*, but do it *thus*? With a lump of clay laid on either eye, and washed off again, he couched those cataracts immediately which the most skilful oculist, with the finest instrument and the most curious hand, could not remove. No doubt this is *he that should come*, for by him the blind receive their sight.

(2.) It is an instance of the virtue of faith and obedience. This man let Christ do what *he* pleased, and did what he appointed him to do, and so was cured. Those that would be healed by Christ must be ruled by him. He *came back* from the pool to his neighbours and acquaintance, wondering and wondered at; he came *seeing*. This represents the benefit gracious souls find in attending on instituted ordinances, according to Christ's appointment; they have gone to the pool of Siloam weak, and have come away strengthened; have gone doubting, and come away satisfied; have gone mourning, and come away rejoicing; have gone trembling, and come away triumphing; have gone *blind*, and come away *seeing*, come away singing, ²⁵¹⁸ Isaiah 52:8.

~~498~~ JOHN 9:8-12

SIGHT GIVEN TO ONE BORN BLIND

Such a wonderful event as the giving of sight to a man born blind could not but be the talk of the town, and many heeded it no more than they do other town-talk, that is but nine days' wonder; but here we are told what the neighbours said of it, for the confirmation of the matter of fact. That which at first was not believed without *scrutiny* may afterwards be admitted without *scruple*. Two things are debated in this conference about it: —

I. Whether this was the same man that had before been blind, v. 8.

1. The neighbours that lived near the place where he was born and bred, and knew that he had been blind, could not but be amazed when they saw that he had his eye-sight, had it on a sudden, and perfectly; and they said, *Is not this he that sat and begged?* It seems, this blind man was a common beggar, being disabled to work for his living; and so discharged from the obligation of the law, that if *any would not work, neither should he eat*. When he could not go about, he *sat*; if we cannot *work* for God, we must *sit still* quietly for him. When he could not labour, his parents not being able to maintain him, he *begged*. Note, Those who cannot otherwise subsist must not, like the unjust steward, be *ashamed to beg*; let no man be ashamed of anything but sin. There are some common beggars that are objects of charity, that should be distinguished; and we must not let the

bees starve for the sake of the drones or wasps that are among them. As to this man,

(1.) It was well ordered by Providence that he on whom this miracle was wrought should be a common beggar, and so generally known and remarkable, by which means the truth of the miracle was better attested, and there were more to witness against those infidel Jews who would not believe *that he had been blind* than if he had been maintained in his father's house.

(2.) It was the greater instance of Christ's condescension that he seemed (as I may say) to take more pains about the cure of a common beggar than of others. When it was for the advantage of his miracles that they should be wrought on those that were remarkable, he pitched upon those that were made so by their poverty and misery; not by their dignity.

2. In answer to this inquiry,

(1.) Some said, *This is he*, the very same man; and these are witnesses to the truth of the miracle, for they had long known him stone-blind.

(2.) Others, who could not think it possible that a man born blind should thus on a sudden receive his sight, for that reason, and no other, said, *He is not he, but is like him*, and so, by their confession, if it be he, it is a great miracle that is wrought upon him. Hence we may take occasion to think,

[1.] Of the wisdom and power of Providence in ordering such a universal variety of the faces of men and women, so that no two are so alike but that they may be distinguished, which is necessary to society, and commerce, and the administration of justice. And,

[2.] Of the wonderful change which the converting grace of God makes upon some who before were very wicked and vile, but are thereby so universally and visibly altered that one would not take them to be the same persons.

3. This controversy was soon decided by the man himself: *He said, I am he*, the very man that so lately sat and begged; "I am he that was blind, and was an object of the charity of men, but now see, and am a monument of the mercy and grace of God." We do not find that the neighbours appealed to him in this matter, but he, hearing the debate, interposed, and put an end to it. It is a piece of justice we owe to our neighbours to rectify their

mistakes, and to set things before them, as far as we are able, in a true light. Applying it spiritually, it teaches us that those who are savingly enlightened by the grace of God should be ready to own what they were before that blessed change was wrought, ^{<5013>}1 Timothy 1:13, 14.

II. How he came to have his eyes opened, v. 10-12. They will now turn aside, and *see this great sight*, and enquire further concerning it. He did not *sound a trumpet* when he did these alms, nor perform his cures *upon a stage*; and yet, like a city upon a hill, they could not be hid. Two things these neighbours enquire after: —

1. The manner of the cure: *How were thine eyes opened?* The works of the Lord being great, they ought to be *sought out*, ^{<5012>}Psalm 111:2. It is good to observe the way and method of God's works, and they will appear the more wonderful. We may apply it spiritually; it is strange that blind eyes should be opened, but more strange when we consider how they are opened; how weak the means are that are used, and how strong the opposition that is conquered. In answer to this enquiry the poor man gives them a plain and full account of the matter: *A man that is called Jesus made clay, — and I received sight.* v. 11. Note, Those who have experienced special instances of God's power and goodness, in temporal or spiritual things, should be ready upon all occasions to communicate their experiences, for the glory of God and the instruction and encouragement of others. See David's collection of his experiences, his own and others', ^{<5014>}Psalm 34:4-6. It is a debt we owe to our benefactor, and to our brethren. God's favours are lost *upon* us, when they are lost *with us*, and go no further.

2. The author of it (v. 12): *Where is he?* Some perhaps asked this question out of curiosity. “Where is he, that we may see him?” A man that did such cures as these might well be a show, which one would go a good way for the sight of. Others, perhaps, asked out of ill-will. “Where is he, that we may *seize* him?” There was a proclamation out for the discovering and apprehending of him (^{<5015>}John 11:57); and the unthinking crowd, in spite of all reason and equity, will have ill thoughts of those that are put into an ill name. Some, we hope, asked this question out of *good-will*. “Where is he, that we may be acquainted with him? Where is he, that we may come to him, and share in the favours he is so free of?” In answer to this, he could say nothing: *I know not.* As soon as Christ had sent him to the pool of Siloam, it should seem, he withdrew immediately (as he did, ^{<5016>}John

5:13), and did not stay till the man returned, as if he either doubted of the effect or waited for the man's thanks. Humble souls take more pleasure in *doing good* than in hearing of it again; it will be time enough to hear of it in the *resurrection of the just*. The man had never seen Jesus, for by the time that he had gained his sight he had lost his Physician; and he asked, it is probable, *Where is he?* None of all the new and surprising objects that presented themselves could be so grateful to him as one sight of Christ, but as yet he knew no more of him than that he was called, and rightly called, *Jesus — a Saviour*. Thus in the work of grace wrought upon the soul we see the change, but see not the hand that makes it; for the way of the Spirit is like that of the wind, which thou hearest the sound of, but canst not tell *whence it comes nor whither it goes*.

~~403~~ JOHN 9:13-34

THE CAVILLING OF THE PHARISEES

One would have expected that such a miracle as Christ wrought upon the blind man would have settled his reputation, and silenced and shamed all opposition, but it had the contrary effect; instead of being embraced as a prophet for it, he is prosecuted as a criminal.

I. Here is the information that was given in to the Pharisees concerning this matter: *They brought to the Pharisees him that aforesaid was blind*, v. 13. They brought him to the great sanhedrim, which consisted chiefly of Pharisees, at least the Pharisees in the sanhedrim were most active against Christ.

1. Some think that those who brought this man to the Pharisees did it with a *good design*, to show them that this Jesus, whom they persecuted, was not what they represented him, but really a great man, and one that gave considerable proofs of a divine mission. What hath convinced us of the truth and excellency of religion, and hath removed our prejudices against it, we should be forward, as we have opportunity, to offer to others for their conviction.

2. It should seem, rather, that they did it with an *ill design*, to exasperate the Pharisees the more against Christ, and there was no need of this, for they were bitter enough of themselves. They brought him with such a

suggestion as that in ~~John~~ John 11:47, 48, *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* Note, Those rulers that are of a persecuting spirit shall never want ill instruments about them, that will blow the coals, and make them worse.

II. The ground which was pretended for this information, and the colour given to it. That which is good was never maligned but under the imputation of something evil. And the crime objected here (v. 14) was that *it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.* The profanation of the sabbath day is certainly wicked, and gives a man a very ill character; but the traditions of the Jews had made that to be a violation of the law of the sabbath which was far from being so. Many a time this matter was contested between Christ and the Jews, that it might be settled for the benefit of the church in all ages. But it may be asked, “Why would Christ not only work miracles on the sabbath day, but work them in such a manner as he knew would give offence to the Jews? When he had healed the impotent man, why should he bid him carry his bed? Could he not have cured this blind man without making clay?” I answer,

- 1.** He would not seem to yield to the usurped power of the scribes and Pharisees. Their government was illegal, their impositions were arbitrary, and their zeal for the rituals consumed the substantial of religion; and therefore Christ would not *give place* to them, *by subjection, no not for an hour.* Christ was made under the law of God, but not under their law.
- 2.** He did it that he might, both by word and action, expound the law of the fourth commandment, and vindicate it from their corrupt glosses, and so teach us that a weekly sabbath is to be *perpetually* observed in the church, one day in seven (for what need was there to explain that law, if it must be presently abrogated?) and that it is not to be so *ceremonially* observed by us as it was by the Jews? Works of necessity and mercy are allowed, and the sabbath-rest to be kept, not so much for its own sake as in order to the sabbath-work.
- 3.** Christ chose to work his cures on the sabbath day to dignify and sanctify the day, and to intimate that spiritual cures should be wrought mostly on the Christian sabbath day. How many blind eyes have been opened by the preaching of the gospel, that blessed eye-salve, on the Lord's day! How many impotent souls cured on that day!

III. The trial and examination of this matter by the Pharisees, v. 15. So much passion, prejudice, and ill-humour, and so little reason, appear here, that the discourse is nothing but crossing questions. One would think, when a man in these circumstances was brought before them, they would have been so taken up in admiring the miracle, and congratulating the happiness of the poor man, that they could not have been peevish with him. But their enmity to Christ had divested them of all manner of humanity, and divinity too. Let us see how they teased this man.

1. They interrogated him concerning the cure itself.

(1.) They doubted whether he had indeed been *born blind*, and demanded proof of that which even the prosecutors had acknowledged (v. 18): They *did not believe*, that is, they would not, that he was *born blind*. Men that seek occasion to quarrel with the clearest truths may find it if they please; and they that resolve to *hold fast deceit* will never want a handle to hold it by. This was not a prudent caution, but a prejudiced infidelity. However, it was a good way that they took for the clearing of this: *They called the parents of the man who had received his sight*. This they did in hopes to disprove the miracle. These parents were poor and timorous, and if they had said that they could not be sure that this was their son, or that it was only some weakness or dimness in his sight that he had been born with, which if they had been able to get help for him might have been cured long since, or had otherwise prevaricated, for fear of the court, the Pharisees had gained their point, had robbed Christ of the honour of this miracle, which would have lessened the reputation of all the rest. But God so ordered and overruled this counsel of theirs that it turned to the more effectual proof of the miracle, and left them under a necessity of being either convinced or confounded. Now in this part of the examination we have,

[1.] The questions that were put to them (v. 19): They *asked them* in an imperious threatening way, “*Is this your son? Dare you swear to it? Do you say he was born blind? Are you sure of it? Or did he but pretend to be so, to have an excuse for his begging? How then doth he now see?* That is impossible, and therefore you had better unsay it.” Those who cannot bear the light of truth do all they can to *eclipse* it, and hinder the discovery of it. Thus the *managers of evidence*, or mismanagers rather, lead witnesses out of the way, and teach them how to conceal or disguise the truth, and so

involve themselves in a double guilt, like that of Jeroboam, who sinned, and made Israel to sin.

[2.] Their answers to these interrogatories, in which,

First, They fully attest that which they could safely say in this matter; *safely*, that is, upon their own knowledge, and *safely*, that is, without running themselves into a *premunire* (v. 20): *We know that this is our son* (for they were daily conversant with him, and had such a natural affection to him as the true mother had, ^{<118>}1 Kings 3:26, which made them know it was *their own*); and we know that he was *born blind*. They had reason to know it, inasmuch as it had cost them many a sad thought, and many a careful troublesome hour, about him. How often had they looked upon him with grief, and lamented their child's blindness more than all the burdens and inconveniences of their poverty, and wished he had never been born, rather than be born to such an uncomfortable life! Those who are ashamed of their children, or any of their relations, because of their bodily infirmities, may take a reproof from *these* parents, who freely owned, This is *our son*, though he was *born blind*, and lived upon alms.

Secondly, They cautiously decline giving any evidence concerning his cure; partly because they were not themselves eye-witnesses of it, and could say nothing to it *of their own knowledge*; and partly because they found it was a *tender point*, and would not bear to be meddled with. And therefore, having owned that he was *their son* and was *born blind*, further these deponents say not.

a. Observe how warily they express themselves (v. 21): “*By what means he now seeth we know not, or who has opened his eyes we know not, otherwise than by hearsay; we can give no account either by what means or by whose hand it was done.*” See how the wisdom of this world teaches men to *trim* the matter in critical junctures. Christ was accused as a sabbath-breaker, and as an imposter. Now these parents of the blind man, though they were not eye-witnesses of the cure, were yet fully assured of it, and were bound in gratitude to have borne their testimony to the honour of the Lord Jesus, who had done their son so great a kindness; but they had not courage to do it, and then thought it might serve to atone for their not appearing in favour of him that they said nothing to his prejudice; whereas, in the day of trial, he that is not *apparently* for Christ is justly looked upon as *really against* him, ^{<113>}Luke 11:23; ^{<133>}Mark 8:38. That they might not be further urged in this matter, they refer themselves and

the court to him: *He is of age, ask him, he shall speak for himself*. This implies that while children are not of age (while they are *infants*, such as cannot speak) it is incumbent upon their parents to *speak for them*, speak to God for them in prayer, speak to the church for them in baptism; but, when they are of age, it is fit that they should be asked whether they be willing to stand to that which their parents did for them, and let them speak for themselves. This man, though he was *born blind*, seems to have been of quick understanding above many, which enabled him to speak for himself better than his friends could speak for him. Thus God often by a kind providence makes up in the mind what is wanting in the body, ^{<423>}1 Corinthians 12:23, 24. His parents turning them over to him was only to save themselves from trouble, and expose him; whereas they that had so great an interest in his *mercies* had reason to embark with him in his *hazards* for the honour of that Jesus who had done so much for them.

b. See the reason why they were so cautious (v. 22, 23): *Because they feared the Jews*. It was not because they would put an honour upon their son, by making him his own advocate, or because they would have the matter cleared by the *best hand*, but because they would shift trouble off from themselves, as most people are in care to do, no matter on whom they throw it. Near is my friend, and near is my child, and perhaps near is my religion, but *nearer is myself* — *Proximus egomet mihi*. But Christianity teaches another lesson, ^{<424>}1 Corinthians 10:24; ^{<426>}Esther 8:6. Here is,

(a.) The *late law* which the sanhedrim had made. It was agreed and enacted by their authority that, if any man within their jurisdiction did *confess* that *Jesus was Christ*, *he should be put out of the synagogue*. Observe,

[a.] The crime designed to be punished, and so prevented, by this statute, and that was embracing Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, and manifesting this by any overt-act, which amounted to a confessing of him. They themselves did expect a Messiah, but they could by no means bear to think that this Jesus should be he, nor admit the question whether he were or no, for two reasons: — *First*, Because his precepts were all so contrary to their traditional *laws*. The spiritual worship he prescribed overthrew their formalities; nor did any thing more effectually destroy their singularity and narrow-spiritedness than that universal charity which he taught; humility and mortification,

repentance and self-denial, were lessons new to them, and sounded harsh and strange in their ears. *Secondly*, Because his promises and appearances were so contrary to their traditional hopes. They expected a Messiah in outward pomp and splendour, that should not only free the nation from the Roman yoke, but advance the grandeur of the sanhedrim, and make all the members of it princes and peers: and now to hear of a Messiah whose outward circumstances were all mean and poor, whose first appearance and principal residence were in Galilee, a despised province, who never made his court to them, nor sought their favour, whose followers were neither sword-men nor gown-men, nor any men of honour, but contemptible fishermen, who proposed and promised no redemption but from sin, no consolation of Israel but what is spiritual and divine, and at the same time bade his followers expect the cross, and count upon persecution; this was such a reproach to all the ideas they had formed and filled the minds of their people with, such a blow to their power and interest, and such a disappointment to all their hopes, that they could never be reconciled to it, nor so much as give it a fair or patient hearing, but, right or wrong, it must be *crushed*.

[b.] The penalty to be inflicted for this crime. If any should own himself a disciple of Jesus, he should be deemed and taken as an apostate from the faith of the Jewish church, and a rebel and traitor against the government of it, and should therefore be *put out of the synagogue*, as one that had rendered himself unworthy of the honours, and incapable of the privileges, of their church; he should be excommunicated, and expelled the commonwealth of Israel. Nor was this merely an ecclesiastical censure, which a man that made no conscience of their authority might slight, but it was, in effect, an *outlawry*, which excluded a man from civil commerce and deprived him of his liberty and property. Note, *First*, Christ's holy religion, from its first rise, has been opposed by penal laws made against the professors of it; as if men's consciences would otherwise *naturally* embrace it, this unnatural force has been put upon them. *Secondly*, The church's artillery, when the command of it has fallen into ill hands, has often been turned against itself, and ecclesiastical censures have been made to serve a carnal secular interest. It is no new thing to see those cast out of the synagogue that were the greatest ornaments and

blessings of it, and to hear those that expelled them say, *The Lord be glorified*, ^{236B} Isaiah 66:5. Now of this edict it is said,

1. That the Jews had agreed it, or *conspired* it. Their consultation and communion herein were a perfect conspiracy against the crown and dignity of the Redeemer, against the Lord and his Anointed.

2. That they had already agreed it. Though he had been but a few months in any public character among them, and, one would think, in so short a time could not have made them jealous of him, yet thus early were they aware of his growing interest, and already agreed to do their utmost to suppress it. He had lately made his escape out of the temple, and, when they saw themselves baffled in their attempts to take him, they presently took this course, to make it penal for any body to own him. Thus unanimous and thus expeditious are the enemies of the church, and their counsels; but he that *sits in heaven laughs at them*, and *has them in derision*, and so may we.

(b.) The influence which this law had upon the parents of the blind man. They declined saying any thing of Christ, and shuffled it off to their son, *because they feared the Jews*. Christ had incurred the frowns of the government to do their son a kindness, but they would not incur them to do him any honour. Note, *The fear of man brings a snare* (^{216B} Proverbs 29:25), and often makes people deny and disown Christ, and his truths and ways, and act against their consciences. Well, the parents have thus disentangled themselves, and are discharged from any further attendance; let us now go on with the examination of the man himself; the doubt of the Pharisees, whether he was *born blind*, was put out of doubt *by them*; and therefore,

(2.) They enquired of *him* concerning the *manner of the cure*, and made their remarks upon it, v. 15, 16.

[1.] The same question which his neighbours had put to him *now again the Pharisees asked him, how he had received his sight*. This they enquired not with any sincere desire to find out the truth, by tracing the report to the original, but with a desire to find an occasion against Christ; for, if the man should relate the matter fully, they would prove Christ a sabbath-breaker; if he should vary from his former story, they would have some colour to suspect the whole to be a collusion.

[2.] The same answer, in effect, which he had before given to his neighbours, he here repeats to the Pharisees: *He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.* He does not here speak of the making of the clay, for indeed he had not seen it made. That circumstance was not essential, and might give the Pharisees most occasion against him, and therefore he waives it. In the former account he said, *I washed, and received sight;* but lest they should think it was only a glimpse for the present, which a heated imagination might fancy itself to have, he now says, “*I do see: it is a complete and lasting cure.*”

[3.] The remarks made upon this story were very different, and occasioned a debate in the court, v. 16.

First, Some took this occasion to censure and condemn Christ for what he had done. Some of the Pharisees said, *This man is not of God, as he pretends, because he keepeth not the sabbath day.*

1. The doctrine upon which this censure is grounded is very true — that those *are not of God* — those pretenders to prophecy not *sent of God*, those pretenders to saintship not *born of God* — who do not *keep the sabbath day*. Those that are of God will *keep the commandments of God*; and this is his commandment, that we sanctify the sabbath. Those that are of God keep up communion with God, and delight to hear from him, and speak to him, and therefore will observe the sabbath, which is a day appointed for intercourse with heaven. The sabbath is called a *sign*, for the sanctifying of it is a sign of a sanctified heart, and the profaning of it a sign of a profane heart. But,

2. The application of it to our Saviour is very unjust, for he did religiously observe the sabbath day, and never in any instance violated it, never did otherwise than *well* on the sabbath day. He did not keep the sabbath according to the tradition of the elders and the superstitious observances of the Pharisees, but he kept it according to the command of God, and therefore, no doubt, he was of God, and his miracles proved him to be *Lord also of the sabbath day*. Note, much unrighteous and uncharitable judging is occasioned by men's making the rules of religion more strict than God has made them, and adding their own fancies to God's appointments, as the Jews here, in the case of sabbath-sanctification. We ourselves may forbear such and such things, on the sabbath day, as we find a distraction to us, and we do well, but we must not therefore tie up others to the same strictness.

Every thing that we take for a rule of practice must not presently be made a rule of judgment.

Secondly, Others spoke in his favour, and very pertinently urged, *How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?* It seems that even in this *council of the ungodly* there were some that were capable of a *free thought*, and were witnesses for Christ, even in the midst of his enemies. The matter of fact was plain, that this was a true miracle, the more it was searched into the more it was cleared; and this brought his former similar works to mind, and gave occasion to speak magnificently of them, *toiauta semeia* — *such great signs*, so many, so evident. And the inference from it is very natural: Such things as these could never be done by a *man that is a sinner*, that is, not by any mere man, in his own name, and by his own power; or, rather, not by one that is a cheat or an imposter, and in that sense a sinner; such a one may indeed show some *signs and lying wonders*, but not such signs and true wonders as Christ wrought. How could a man produce such divine credentials, if he had not a divine commission? Thus there was a *division among them, a schism*, so the word is; they clashed in their opinion, a warm debate arose, and the *house divided* upon it. Thus God defeats the counsels of his enemies by dividing them; and by such testimonies as these given against the malice of persecutors, and the rubs they meet with, their designs against the church are sometimes rendered ineffectual and always inexcusable.

2. After their enquiry concerning the cure, we must observe their enquiry concerning the *author* of it. And here observe,

(1.) What the man said of him, in answer to their enquiry. They ask him (v. 17), “*What sayest thou of him, seeing that he has opened thine eyes? What dost thou think of his doing this? And what idea hast thou of him that did it?*” If he should speak *slightly* of Christ, in answer to this, as he might be tempted to do, to please them, now that he was in their hands, as his parents had done — if he should say, “I know not what to make of him; he may be a conjuror for aught I know, or some mountebank” — they would have triumphed in it. Nothing confirms Christ's enemies in their enmity to him so much as the slights put upon him by those that have passed for his friends. But, if he should speak honourably of Christ, they would prosecute him upon their new law, which did not except, no, not his own patient; they would make him an example, and so deter others from applying to Christ for cures, for which, though they came cheap from

Christ, yet they would make them pay dearly. Or perhaps Christ's friends proposed to have the man's own sentiments concerning his physician, and were willing to know, since he appeared to be a sensible man, what he thought of him. Note, Those whose eyes Christ has opened know best what to say of him, and have great reason, upon all occasions, to say well of him. What think we of Christ? To this question the poor man makes a short, plain, and direct answer: "*He is a prophet*, he is one inspired and sent of God to preach, and work miracles, and deliver to the world a divine message." There had been no prophets among the Jews for three hundred years; yet they did not conclude that they should have no more, for they knew that he was yet to come who should *seal up vision and prophecy*, ~~208~~ Daniel 9:24. It should seem, this man had not any thoughts that Christ was the Messiah, the great prophet, but one of the same rank with the other prophets. The woman of Samaria concluded he was *a prophet* before she had any thought of his being the Messiah (~~209~~ John 4:19); so this blind man thought well of Christ according to the light he had, though he did not think well enough of him; but, being faithful in what he had already attained to, God revealed even *that* unto him. This poor blind beggar had a clearer judgment of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and saw further into the proofs of a divine mission, than the *masters in Israel*, that assumed an authority to judge of prophets.

(2.) What they said of him, in reply to the man's testimony. Having in vain attempted to invalidate the evidence of the fact, and finding that indeed a *notable miracle was wrought*, and they *could not deny it*, they renew their attempt to banter it, and run it down, and do all they can to shake the good opinion the man had of him that opened his eyes, and to convince him that Christ was a bad man (v. 24): *Give God the praise, we know that this man is a sinner*. Two ways this is understood:

[1.] By way of *advice*, to take heed of ascribing the praise of his cure to a sinful man, but to give it all to God, to whom it was due. Thus, under colour of zeal for the honour of God, they rob Christ of his honour, as those do who will not worship Christ as God, under pretence of zeal for this great truth, that there is but one God to be worshipped; whereas this is his declared will, that all men should *honour the Son even as they honour the Father*; and in confessing that Christ is Lord we *give glory to God the Father*. When God makes use of men that are sinners as instruments of good to us, we must *give God the glory*, for every creature is that to us which he makes it to be; and yet there is gratitude owing to the

instruments. It was a good word, *Give God the praise*, but here it was ill used; and there seems to be this further in it, “This man is *a sinner*, a *bad man*, and therefore give the praise so much the more to God, who could work by such an instrument.”

[2.] By way of *adjuration*; so some take it. “We know (though thou dost not, who hast but lately come, as it were, into a new world) that this man is *a sinner*, a great impostor, and cheats the country; this we are sure of, therefore *give God praise*” (as Joshua said to Achan) “by making an ingenuous confession of the fraud and collusion which we are confident there is in this matter; in God's name, man, tell the truth.” Thus is God's name abused in papal inquisitions, when by oaths, *ex officio*, they extort accusations of *themselves* from the *innocent*, and of *others* from the *ignorant*. See how basely they speak of the Lord Jesus: *We know that this man is a sinner*, is a man of sin. In which we may observe, *First*, Their insolence and pride. They would not have it thought, when they asked the man what he thought of him, that they needed information; nay, they know very well that he is a sinner, and nobody can convince them of the contrary. He had challenged them to their faces (~~486~~ John 8:46) to *convince him of sin*, and they had nothing to say; but now behind his back they speak of him as a malefactor, convicted upon the notorious evidence of the fact. Thus false accusers make up in confidence what is wanting in proof. *Secondly*, The injury and indignity hereby done to the Lord Jesus. When he became man, he took upon him the form not only of a *servant*, but of a *sinner* (~~486~~ Romans 8:3), and passed for a sinner in common with the rest of mankind. Nay, he was represented as a sinner of the first magnitude, a sinner above all men; and, being *made sin for us*, he despised even this shame.

3. The debate that arose between the Pharisees and this poor man concerning Christ. They say, *He is a sinner*; he says, *He is a prophet*. As it is an encouragement to those who are concerned for the cause of Christ to hope that it shall never be lost for want of witnesses, when they find a poor blind beggar picked up from the way-side, and made a witness for Christ, to the faces of his most impudent enemies; so it is an encouragement to those who are called out to witness for Christ to find with what prudence and courage this man managed his defence, according to the promise, *It shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak*. Though he had never seen Jesus, he had felt his grace. Now in the

parley between the Pharisees and this poor man we may observe three steps: —

(1.) He sticks to the certain matter of fact the evidence of which they endeavour to shake. That which is doubtful is best resolved into that which is plain, and therefore,

[1.] He adheres to that which to himself at least, and to his own satisfaction, was past dispute (v. 25): “*Whether he be a sinner or no I know not, I will not now stand to dispute, nor need I, the matter is plain, and though I should altogether hold my peace would speak for itself;*” or, as it might better be rendered, “*If he be a sinner, I know it not, I see no reason to say so, but the contrary; for this one thing I know, and can be more sure of than you can be of that of which you are so confident, that whereas I was blind, now I see, and therefore must not only say that he has been a good friend to me, but that he is a prophet; I am both able and bound to speak well of him.*” Now here, *First*, He tacitly reproves their great assurance of the ill character they gave of the blessed Jesus: “*You say that you know him to be a sinner; I, who know him as well as you do, cannot give any such character.*” *Secondly*, He boldly relies upon his own experience of the power and goodness of the holy Jesus, and resolves to abide by it. There is no disputing against experience, nor arguing a man out of his senses; here is one that is properly an eyewitness of the power and grace of Christ, though he had never seen him. Note, As Christ's mercies are most valued by those that have felt the want of them, that have been blind and now see, so the most powerful and durable affections to Christ are those that arise from an experimental knowledge of him, ⁶¹¹1 John 1:1; ⁶¹²Acts 4:20. The poor man does not here give a nice account of the method of the cure, nor pretend to describe it *philosophically*, but in short, *Whereas I was blind, now I see*. Thus in the work of grace in the soul, though we cannot tell when and how, by what instruments and by what steps and advances, the blessed change was wrought, yet we may take the comfort of it if we can say, through grace, “*Whereas I was blind, now I see. I did live a carnal, worldly, sensual life, but, thanks be to God, it is now otherwise with me,*” ⁶¹³Ephesians 5:8.

[2.] They endeavour to baffle and stifle the evidence by a needless repetition of their enquiries into it (v. 26): *What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?* They asked these questions, *First*, Because they wanted something to say, and would rather speak *impertinently* than seem

to be silenced or run a-ground. Thus eager disputants, that resolve they will have the last word, by such vain repetitions, to avoid the shame of being silenced, make themselves accountable for many idle words.

Secondly, Because they hoped, by putting the man upon repeating his evidence, to catch him tripping in it, or wavering, and then they would think they had gained a good point.

(2.) He upbraids them with their obstinate infidelity and invincible prejudices, and they revile him as a disciple of Jesus, v. 27-29, where the man is more bold with them and they are more sharp upon him than before.

[1.] The man boldly upbraids them with their wilful and unreasonable opposition to the evidence of this miracle, v. 27. He would not gratify them with a repetition of the story, but bravely replied, *I have told you already, and you did not hear, wherefore would you hear it again, will you also be his disciples?* Some think that he spoke *seriously*, and really expecting that they would be convinced. “He had many disciples, I will be one, will you also come in among them?” Some zealous young Christians see so much reason for religion that they are ready to think every one will presently be on their mind. But it rather seems to be spoken *ironically*: “*Will you be his disciples?* No, I know you abhor the thoughts of it; why then should you desire to hear that which will either make you his disciples or leave you inexcusable if you be not?” Those that wilfully shut their eyes against the light, as these Pharisees here did, *First*, Make themselves contemptible and base, as these here did, who were justly exposed by this poor man for denying the conclusion, when they had nothing to object against either of the premises. *Secondly*, They forfeit all the benefit of further instructions and means of knowledge and conviction: they that have been told once, and *would not hear*, why should they be told it again? ^{<260>}Jeremiah 51:9. See ^{<404>}Matthew 10:14. *Thirdly*, They hereby *receive the grace of God in vain*. This implied in that, “*Will you be his disciples?* No, you resolve you will not; why then would you hear it again, only that you may be his accusers and persecutors?” Those who will not see cause to embrace Christ, and join with his followers, yet, one would think, should see cause enough not to hate and persecute him and them.

[2.] For this they scorn and revile him, v. 28. When they could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke, they broke out into a passion, and scolded him, began to call names, and give him ill language. See what

Christ's faithful witnesses must expect from the adversaries of his truth and cause; let them count upon *all manner of evil* to be said of them, ⁴⁰¹Matthew 5:11. The method commonly taken by unreasonable man is to make out with railing what is wanting in truth and reason.

First, They taunted this man for his affection to Christ; they said, *Thou art his disciple*, as if that were reproach enough, and they could not say worse of him. "We scorn to be his disciples, and will leave that preferment to thee, and such scoundrels as thou art." They do what they can to put Christ's religion in an ill name, and to represent the profession of it as a contemptible scandalous thing. They *reviled him*. The Vulgate reads it, *maledixerunt eum — they cursed him*; and what was their curse? It was this, *Be thou his disciple*. "May such a curse" (saith St. Augustine here) "ever be on us and on our children!" If we take our measures of credit and disgrace from the sentiment or rather clamours of a blind deluded world, we shall *glory in our shame*, and be *ashamed of our glory*. They had no reason to call this man a *disciple of Christ*, he had neither seen him nor heard him preach, only he had spoken favourably of a kindness Christ had done him, and this they could not bear.

Secondly, They gloried in their relation to Moses as their Master: "*We are Moses's disciples*, and do not either need or desire any other teacher."

Note,

- 1.** Carnal professors of religion are very apt to trust to, and be proud of, the dignities and privileges of their profession, while they are strangers to the principles and powers of their religion. These Pharisees had before boasted of their good parentage: *We are Abraham's seed*; here they boast of their good education, *We are Moses's disciples*; as if these would save them.
- 2.** It is sad to see how much one part of religion is opposed, under colour of zeal for another part. There was a perfect harmony between Christ and Moses; Moses prepared for Christ, and Christ perfected Moses, so that they might be disciples of Moses, and become the disciples of Christ too; and yet they here put them in opposition, nor could they have persecuted Christ but under the shelter of the abused name of Moses. Thus those who gainsay the doctrine of free grace value themselves as promoters of man's duty, *We are Moses's disciples*; while, on the other hand, those that cancel the obligation of the law value themselves as the assertors of free grace, and as if none

were the disciples of Jesus but they; whereas, if we rightly understand the matter, we shall see God's grace and man's duty meet together and kiss and befriend each other.

Thirdly, They gave some sort of reason for their adhering to Moses against Christ (v. 29): *We know that God spoke unto Moses; as for this fellow, we know not whence he is*. But did they not know that among other things which God spoke unto Moses this was one, that they must expect another prophet, and further revelation of the mind of God? yet, when our Lord Jesus, pursuant to what God said to Moses, did appear, and gave sufficient proofs of his being that prophet, under pretence of sticking to the old religion, and the established church, they not only forfeited, but forsook, their own mercies. In this argument of their observe,

1. How impertinently they allege, in defence of their enmity to Christ, that which none of his followers ever denied: *We know that God spoke unto Moses*, and, thanks be to God, we know it too, more plainly to Moses than to any other of the prophets; but what then? God spoke to Moses, and does it therefore follow that Jesus is an impostor? Moses was a prophet also? Moses spoke honourably of Jesus (~~456~~ John 5:46), and Jesus spoke honourably of Moses (~~463~~ Luke 16:29); they were both faithful in the same house of God, Moses as a servant, Christ as a Son; therefore their pleading Moses' divine warrant in opposition to Christ's was an artifice, to make unthinking people believe it was as certain that Jesus was a false prophet as that Moses was a true one; whereas they were both true.

2. How absurdly they urge their ignorance of Christ as a reason to justify their contempt of him: *As for this fellow*. Thus scornfully do they speak of the blessed Jesus, as if they did not think it worth while to charge their memories with a name so inconsiderable; they express themselves with as much disdain of the Shepherd of Israel as if he had not been worthy to be *set with the dogs of their flock*: *As for this fellow*, this sorry fellow, *we know not whence he is*. They looked upon themselves to have the key of knowledge, that none must preach without a license first had and obtained from them, under the seal of their court. They expected that all who set up for teachers should apply to them, and give them satisfaction, which this Jesus had never done, never so far owned their power as to ask their leave, and therefore they concluded him an intruder, and one that came not in by the door: *They*

knew not whence nor what he was, and therefore concluded him a sinner; whereas those we know little of we should judge charitably of; but proud and narrow souls will think none good but themselves, and those that are in their interest. It was not long ago that the Jews had made the contrary to this an objection against Christ (~~407~~ John 7:27): We know this man whence he is, but when Christ comes no man knows whence he is. Thus they could with the greatest assurance either affirm or deny the same thing, according as they saw it would serve their turn. They knew not whence he was; and whose fault was that?

(1.) It is certain that they ought to have enquired. The Messiah was to appear about this time, and it concerned them to look about them, and examine every indication; but these priests, like those, ~~206~~ Jeremiah 2:6, *said not, Where is the Lord?*

(2.) It is certain that they might have known whence he was, might not only have known, by searching the register, that he was born in Bethlehem; but by enquiring into his doctrine, miracles, and conversation, they might have known that he was sent of God, and had better orders, a better commission, and far better instructions, than any they could give him. See the absurdity of infidelity. Men will not know the doctrine of Christ because they are resolved they will not believe it, and then pretend they do not believe it because they do not know it. Such ignorance and unbelief, which support one another, aggravate one another.

(3.) He reasons with them concerning this matter, and they excommunicate him.

[1.] The poor man, finding that he had reason on his side, which they could not answer, grows more bold, and, in prosecution of his argument, is very close upon them.

First, He wonders at their obstinate infidelity (v. 30); not at all daunted by their frowns, nor shaken by their confidence, he bravely answered, "Why, herein is a marvelous thing, the strangest instance of wilful ignorance that ever was heard of among men that pretend to sense, that you know not whence he is, and yet he has opened mine eyes." Two things he wonders at: —

1. That they should be strangers to a man so *famous*. He that could open the eyes of the blind must certainly be a considerable man, and worth taking notice of. The Pharisees were inquisitive men, had a large correspondence and acquaintance, thought themselves the eyes of the church and its watchmen, and yet that they should talk as if they thought it below them to take cognizance of such a man as this, and have conversation with him, this is a strange thing indeed. There are many who pass for learned and knowing men, who understand business, and can talk sensibly in other things, who yet are ignorant, to a wonder, of the doctrine of Christ, who have no concern, no, not so much as a curiosity, to acquaint themselves with that which the *angels desire to look into*.

2. That they should question the divine mission of one that had undoubtedly wrought a divine miracle. When they said, *We know not whence he is*, they meant, “We know not any proof that his doctrine and ministry are from heaven.” “Now this is strange,” saith the poor man, “that the miracle wrought upon me has not convinced you, and put the matter out of doubt, — that you, whose education and studies give you advantages above others of discerning the things of God, should thus shut your eyes against the light.” It is a *marvelous work and wonder, when the wisdom of the wise thus perisheth* (²³⁴Isaiah 29:14), that they deny the truth of that of which they cannot gainsay the evidence. Note,

(1.) The unbelief of those who enjoy the means of knowledge and conviction is indeed a marvelous thing, ⁴⁰⁶Mark 6:6.

(2.) Those who have themselves experienced the power and grace of the Lord Jesus do especially wonder at the wilfulness of those who reject him, and, having such good thoughts of him themselves, are amazed that others have not. Had Christ opened the eyes of the Pharisees, they would not have doubted his being a prophet.

Secondly, He argues strongly against them, v. 31-33. They had determined concerning Jesus that he was not of God (v. 16), but was a *sinner* (v. 24), in answer to which the man here proves not only that he was *not a sinner* (v. 31), but that he was *of God*, v. 33.

a. He argues here,

(a.) With great knowledge. Though he could not read a letter of the book, he was well acquainted with the scripture and the things of God; he had wanted the sense of seeing, yet had well improved that of hearing, by which faith cometh; yet this would not have served him if he had not had an extraordinary presence of God with him, and special aids of his Spirit, upon this occasion.

(b.) With great zeal for the honour of Christ, whom he could not endure to hear run down, and evil spoken of.

(c.) With great boldness, and courage, and undauntedness, not terrified by the proudest of his adversaries. Those that are ambitious of the favours of God must not be afraid of the frowns of men. "See here," saith Dr. Whitby, "a blind man and unlearned judging more rightly of divine things than the whole learned council of the Pharisees, whence we learn that we are not always to be led by the authority of councils, popes, or bishops; and that it is not absurd for laymen sometimes to vary from their opinions, these overseers being sometimes guilty of great oversights."

b. His argument may be reduced into form, somewhat like that of David, ~~1668~~ Psalm 66:18-20. The proposition in David's argument is, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me*; here it is to the same purport, *God heareth not sinners*: the assumption there is, *But verily God hath heard me*; here it is, Verily God hath heard Jesus, he hath been honoured with the doing of that which was never done before: the conclusion there is to the honour, *Blessed be God*; here to the honour of the Lord Jesus, *He is of God*.

(a.) He lays it down for an undoubted truth that none but good men are the favourites of heaven (v. 31): *Now we know, you know it as well as I, that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and does his will, him he heareth*. Here,

[a.] The assertions, rightly understood, are true. *First*, Be it spoken to the terror of the wicked, *God heareth not sinners*, that is, such sinners as the Pharisees meant when they said of Christ, *He is a sinner*, one that, under the shelter of God's name, advanced the devil's interest. This bespeaks no discouragement to repenting returning sinners, but to those that go on still in their trespasses, that make their prayers not only consistent with, but subservient to, their sins, as the hypocrites

do; God will not *hear* them, he will not own them, nor give an answer of peace to their prayers. *Secondly*, Be it spoken to the comfort of the righteous, *If any man be a worshipper of God, and does his will, him he heareth*. Here is,

1. The complete character of a good man: he is one that *worships God*, and *does his will*; he is constant in his devotions at set times, and regular in his conversation at all times. He is one that makes it his business to glorify his Creator by the solemn adoration of his name and a sincere obedience to his will and law; both must go together.

2. The unspeakable comfort of such a man: him *God hears*; hears his complaints, and relieves him; hears his appeals, and rights him; hears his praises, and accepts them; hears his prayers, and answers them, ~~4385~~ Psalm 34:15.

[b.] The application of these truths is very pertinent to prove that he, at whose word such a divine power was put forth as cured one born blind, was not a bad man, but, having manifestly such an interest in the holy God as that he *heard him always* (~~4394~~ John 9:41, 42), was certainly a holy one.

(b.) He magnifies the miracles which Christ had wrought, to strengthen the argument the more (v. 32): *Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind*. This is to show either,

[a.] That it was a true miracle, and above the power of nature; it was never heard that any man, by the use of natural means, had cured one that was *born blind*; no doubt, this man and his parents had been very inquisitive into cases of this nature, whether any such had been helped, and could hear of none, which enabled him to speak this with the more assurance. Or,

[b.] That it was an extraordinary miracle, and beyond the precedents of former miracles; neither Moses nor any of the prophets, though they did great things, ever did such things as this, wherein divine power and divine goodness seem to strive which should outshine. Moses wrought miraculous plagues, but Christ wrought miraculous cures. Note, *First*, The wondrous works of the Lord Jesus were such as the like had never been done before. *Secondly*, It becomes those who have received

mercy from God to magnify the mercies they have received, and to speak honourably of them; not that thereby glory may redound to themselves, and they may seem to be extraordinary favourites of Heaven, but that God may have so much the more glory.

(c.) He therefore concludes, *If this man were not of God, he could no nothing*, that is, nothing extraordinary, no such thing as *this*; and therefore, no doubt, he is *of God*, notwithstanding his nonconformity to your traditions in the business of the sabbath day. Note, What Christ did on earth sufficiently demonstrated what he was in heaven; for, if he had not been sent of God, he could not have wrought such miracles. It is true the man of sin comes with *lying wonders*, but not with real miracles; it is likewise supposed that a false prophet might, by divine permission, give a *sign or a wonder* (⁽⁶⁸¹⁾Deuteronomy 13:1, 2), yet the case is so put as that it would carry with it its own confutation, for it is to enforce a temptation to serve other gods, which was to set God *against himself*. It is true, likewise, that many wicked people have in Christ's name done many wonderful works, which did not prove those that wrought them to be of God, but him in whose name they were wrought. We may each of us know by this whether we are of God or no: *What do we?* What do we for God, for our souls, in working out our salvation? What do we more than others?

[2.] The Pharisees, finding themselves unable either to answer his reasonings or to bear them, fell foul upon him, and with a great deal of pride and passion broke off the discourse, v. 34. Here we are told,

First, What they *said*. Having nothing to reply to his argument, they reflected upon his person: *Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?* They take that amiss which they had reason to take kindly, and are cut to the heart with rage by that which should have pricked them to the heart with penitence. Observe,

1. How they despised him, and what a severe censure they passed upon him: *"Thou wast not only born in sin, as every man is, but altogether so, wholly corrupt, and bearing about with thee in thy body as well as in thy soul the marks of that corruption; thou wast one whom nature stigmatized."* Had he still continued blind, it had been barbarous to upbraid him with it, and thence to gather that he was more deeply tainted with sin than other people; but it was most unjust to take notice of it now that the cure had not only rolled away the reproach of his

blindness, but had *signalized* him as a favourite of Heaven. Some take it thus: “Thou hast been a common beggar, and such are too often common sinners, and thou hast, no doubt, been as bad as any of them;” whereas by his discourse he had proved the contrary, and had evinced a deep tincture of piety. But when proud imperious Pharisees resolve to run a man down, any thing shall serve for a pretence.

2. How they *disdain* to learn of him, or to receive instruction from him: *Dost thou teach us?* A mighty emphasis must be laid here upon *thou* and *us*. “What! wilt *thou*, a silly sorry fellow, ignorant and illiterate, that hast not seen the light of the sun a day to an end, a beggar by the way-side, of the very dregs and refuse of the town, wilt thou pretend to teach *us*, that are the sages of the law and grandees of the church, that sit in Moses's chair and are masters in Israel?” Note, Proud men scorn to be taught, especially by their inferiors, whereas we should never think ourselves too old, nor too wise, nor too good, to learn. Those that have much wealth would have more; and why not those that have much knowledge? And those are to be valued by whom we may improve in learning. What a poor excuse was this for the Pharisees' infidelity, that it would be a disparagement to them to be instructed, and informed, and convinced, by such a silly fellow as this!

Secondly, What they did: They *cast him out*. Some understand it only of a rude and scornful dismissal of him from their council-board; they turned him out of the room by head and shoulders, and perhaps ordered their servants to kick him; they thought it was time to send *him* far enough who came so near their consciences. But it seems rather to be a judicial act; they excommunicated him, probably with the highest degree of excommunication; they cut him off from being a member of the church of Israel. “This poor man,” says Dr. Lightfoot, “was the first confessor, as John Baptist was the first martyr, of the Christian church.” There was a law made that if any confessed Jesus to be the Christ he should be *cast out of the synagogue*, v. 22. But this man had only said of Jesus that he was a prophet, was *of God*: and yet they stretch the law to bring him under the lash of it, as if he had confessed him to be the Christ. To be justly excommunicated and cast out of a pure church, *clave non errante* — *when the key commits no error*, it is a very dreadful thing; for what is so bound on earth is bound in heaven; but to be cast out of a corrupt church (which it is our duty to go out of) and that unjustly, though cast out with an *anathema*, and all the bug-bear ceremonies of bell, book, and candle, is

what we have no reason at all to dread or be aggrieved at. *The curse causeless shall not come.* If they cast Christ's followers out of their synagogues, as he foretels (~~406~~ John 16:2), there is no harm done, when they are become *synagogues of Satan.*

~~405~~ JOHN 9:35-38

CHRIST'S ADDRESS TO THE MAN THAT HAD BEEN BLIND

In these verses we may observe,

I. The tender care which our Lord Jesus took of this poor man (v. 35): *When Jesus heard that they had cast him out* (for it is likely the town rang of it, and everybody cried out shame upon them for it), then he *found him*, which implies his seeking him and looking after him, that he might encourage and comfort him,

1. Because he had, to the best of his knowledge, spoken so very well, so bravely, so boldly, in defence of the Lord Jesus. Note, Jesus Christ will be sure to stand by his witnesses, and own those that own him and his truth and ways. Earthly princes neither do, nor can, take cognizance of all that vindicate them and their government and administration; but our Lord Jesus knows and observes all the faithful testimonies we bear to him at any time, and a book of remembrance is written, and it shall redound not only to our credit hereafter, but our comfort now.

2. Because the Pharisees had cast him out and abused him. Besides the common regard which the righteous Judge of the world has to those who suffer wrongfully (~~406~~ Psalm 103:6), there is a particular notice taken of those that suffer in the cause of Christ and for the testimony of a good conscience. Here was one poor man suffering for Christ, and he took care that as his afflictions abounded his consolations should *much more abound.* Note,

(1.) Though persecutors may exclude good men from their communion, yet they cannot exclude them from communion with Christ, nor put them out of the way of his visits. Happy are they who have a friend from whom men cannot debar them.

(2.) Jesus Christ will graciously find and receive those who for his sake are unjustly rejected and cast out by men. He will be a hiding place to his outcasts, and appear, to the joy of those whom their brethren hated and cast out.

II. The comfortable converse Christ had with him, wherein he brings him acquainted with the consolation of Israel. He had well improved the knowledge he had, and now Christ gives him further instruction; for he that is faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more, ^{<432>}Matthew 13:12.

1. Our Lord Jesus examines his faith: “*Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Dost thou give credit to the promises of the Messiah? Dost thou expect his coming, and art thou ready to receive and embrace him when he is manifested to thee?*” This was that faith of the Son of God by which the saints lived before his manifestation. Observe,

(1.) The Messiah is here called the *Son of God*, and so the Jews had learned to call him from the prophecies, ^{<401>}Psalm 2:7; 89:27. See ch. 1:49, *Thou art the Son of God*, that is, the true Messiah. Those that expected the temporal kingdom of the Messiah delighted rather in calling him the *Son of David*, which gave more countenance to that expectation, ^{<422>}Matthew 22:42. But Christ, that he might give us an idea of his kingdom, as purely spiritual and divine, calls himself the *Son of God*, and rather *Son of man* in general than of David in particular.

(2.) The desires and expectations of the Messiah, which the Old-Testament saints had, guided by and grounded upon the promise, were graciously interpreted and accepted as their believing on the *Son of God*. This faith Christ here enquires after: *Dost thou believe?* Note, The great thing which is now required of us (^{<433>}1 John 3:23), and which will shortly be enquired after concerning us, is our *believing on the Son of God*, and by this we must stand or fall for ever.

2. The poor man solicitously enquires concerning the Messiah he was to believe in, professing his readiness to embrace him and close with him (v. 36): *Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?*

(1.) Some think he did know that Jesus, who cured him, was the Son of God, but did not know which was Jesus, and therefore, supposing this person that talked with him to be a follower of Jesus, desired him to do him the favour to direct him to his master; not that he might satisfy his

curiosity with the sight of him, but that he might the more firmly believe in him, and profess his faith, and *know whom he had believed*. See ²¹⁸⁶Song of Solomon 5:6, 7; 3:2, 3. It is Christ only that can direct us to himself.

(2.) Others think he did know that this person who talked with him was Jesus, the same that cured him, whom he believed a great and good man and a prophet, but did not yet know that he was the Son of God and the true Messiah. “Lord, I believe there is a Christ to come; thou who hast given me bodily sight, tell me, O tell me, who and where this Son of God is.” Christ's question intimated that the Messiah was come, and was now among them, which he presently takes the hint of, and asks, *Where is he, Lord?* The question was rational and just: *Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?* For how could he believe in one of whom he had not heard; the work of ministers is to tell us *who the Son of God is*, that we may believe on him, ⁴¹⁸⁶John 20:31.

3. Our Lord Jesus graciously reveals himself to him as that Son of God on whom he must believe: *Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee*, v. 37. Thou needest not go far to find out the Son of God, *Behold the Word is nigh thee*. We do not find that Christ did thus expressly, and in so many words, reveal himself to any other as to this man here and to the woman of *Samaria*: *I that speak unto thee am he*. He left others to find out by arguments who he was, but to these weak and foolish things of the world he chose to manifest himself, so as not to the *wise and prudent*. Christ here describes himself to this man by two things, which express his great favour to him: —

(1.) *Thou hast seen him*; and he was much indebted to the Lord Jesus for opening his eyes, that he might see him. Now he was made sensible, more than ever, what an unspeakable mercy it was to be cured of his blindness, that he might see the Son of God, a sight which rejoiced his heart more than that of the *light of this world*. Note, The Greatest comfort of bodily eyesight is its serviceableness to our faith and the interests of our souls. How contentedly might this man have returned to his former blindness, like old Simeon, now that his eyes had *seen God's salvation!* If we apply this to the opening of the eyes of the mind, it intimates that spiritual sight is given principally for this end, that we may see Christ, ⁴⁰⁶2 Corinthians 4:6. Can we say that by faith we have seen Christ, seen him in his beauty and glory, in his ability and willingness to save, so seen him as to be

satisfied concerning him, to be satisfied in him? Let us give him the praise, who opened our eyes.

(2.) *It is he that talketh with thee;* and he was indebted to Christ for condescending to do this. He was not only favoured with a sight of Christ, but was admitted into fellowship and communion with him. Great princes are willing to be *seen* by those whom yet they will not vouchsafe to *talk with*. But Christ, by his word and Spirit, talks with those whose desires are towards him, and in talking with them manifests himself to them, as he did to the two disciples, when he talked their hearts warm, ~~123~~ Luke 24:32. Observe, This poor man was solicitously enquiring after the Saviour, when at the same time he saw him, and was talking with him. Note, Jesus Christ is often nearer the souls that seek him than they themselves are aware of. Doubting Christians are sometimes saying, *Where is the Lord?* and fearing that they are cast out from his sight when at the same time it is he that *talks with them, and puts strength into them.*

4. The poor man readily entertains this surprising revelation, and, in a transport of joy and wonder, he said, *Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him.*

(1.) He professed his faith in Christ: *Lord, I believe thee to be the Son of God.* He would not dispute any thing that *he* said who had shown such mercy to him, and wrought such a miracle for him, nor doubt of the truth of a doctrine which was confirmed by such signs. Believing with the heart, he thus confesses with the mouth; and now the bruised reed was become a cedar.

(2.) He paid his homage to him: *He worshipped him,* not only gave him the civil respect due to a great man, and the acknowledgments owing to a kind benefactor, but herein gave him divine honour, and worshipped him as the *Son of God* manifested in the flesh. None but God is to be worshipped; so that in worshipping Jesus he owned him to be God. Note, True faith will show itself in a humble adoration of the Lord Jesus. Those who believe in him will see all the reason in the world to worship him. We never read any more of this man; but, it is very likely, from henceforth he became a constant follower of Christ.

CHRIST'S ADDRESS TO THE PHARISEES

Christ, having spoken comfort to the poor man that was persecuted, here speaks conviction to his persecutors, a specimen of the distributions of trouble and rest at the great day, ⁵³⁰⁶2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7. Probably this was not immediately after his discourse with the man, but he took the next opportunity that offered itself to address the Pharisees. Here is,

I. The account Christ gives of his design in coming into the world (v. 39): “*For judgment I am come to order and administer the great affairs of the kingdom of God among men, and am invested with a judicial power in order thereunto, to be executed in conformity to the wise counsels of God, and in pursuance of them.*” What Christ spoke, he spoke not as a preacher in the pulpit, but as a king upon the throne, and a judge upon the bench.

1. His business into the world was *great*; he came to keep the assizes and general goal-delivery. He came *for judgment*, that is,

(1.) To preach a doctrine and a law which would try men, and effectually discover and distinguish them, and would be completely fitted, in all respects, to be the rule of government now and of judgment shortly.

(2.) To put a difference between men, by revealing the thoughts of many hearts, and laying open men's true characters, by this one test, whether they were well or ill affected to him.

(3.) To change the face of government in his church, to abolish the Jewish economy, to take down that fabric, which, though erected for the time by the hand of God himself, yet by lapse of time was antiquated, and by the incurable corruptions of the managers of it was become rotten and dangerous, and to erect a new building by another model, to institute new ordinances and offices, to abrogate Judaism and enact Christianity; *for this judgment he came into the world*, and it was a great revolution.

2. This great truth he explains by a metaphor borrowed from the miracle which he had lately wrought. That *those who see not might see, and that those who see might be made blind*. Such a difference of Christ's coming is often spoken of; to some his gospel is a *savour of life unto life*, to others of *death unto death*.

(1.) This is applicable to nations and people, that the Gentiles, who had long been destitute of the light of divine revelation, might see it; and the Jews, who had long enjoyed it, might have the things of their peace hid from their eyes, ^{<310>}Hosea 1:10; 2:23. The Gentiles see a great light, while blindness is *happened unto Israel*, and their eyes are darkened.

(2.) To particular sons. Christ came into the world,

[1.] Intentionally and designedly to give sight to those that were spiritually blind; by his word to reveal the object, and by his Spirit to heal the organ, that many precious souls might be turned *from darkness to light*. He came *for judgment*, that is, to set those at liberty from their dark prison that were willing to be released, ^{<311>}Isaiah 61:1.

[2.] Eventually, and in the issue, *that those who see might be made blind*; that those who have a high conceit of their own wisdom, and set up that in contradiction to divine revelation, might be sealed up in ignorance and infidelity. The preaching of the cross was foolishness, and an infatuating think, to those who by wisdom *knew not God*. Christ *came into the world for this judgment*, to administer the affairs of a spiritual kingdom, seated in men's minds. Whereas, in the Jewish church, the blessings and judgments of God's government were mostly temporal, now the method of administration should be changed; and as the good subjects of his kingdom should be blessed with spiritual blessings in heavenly things, such as arise from a due illumination of the mind, so the rebels should be punished with spiritual plagues, not war, famine, and pestilence, as formerly, but such as arise from a *judicial infatuation*, hardness of heart, terror of conscience, strong delusions, vile affections. In this way Christ will *judge between cattle and cattle*, ^{<317>}Ezekiel 34:17, 22.

II. The Pharisees' cavil at this. They were *with him*, not desirous to learn any good from him, but to form evil against him; and they said, *Are we blind also?* When Christ said that *those who saw* should by his coming be made blind, they apprehended that he meant them, who were the *seers* of the people, and valued themselves on their *insight* and *foresight*. "Now," say they, "we know that the common people are blind; but *are we blind also?* What we? The rabbin, the doctors, the learned in the laws, the graduates in the schools, *are we blind too?*" This is *scandalum magnatum* — *a libel on the great*. Note, Frequently those that need reproof most, and deserve it best, though they have wit enough to discern a *tacit* one, have

not grace enough to bear a *just* one. These Pharisees took this reproof for a reproach, as those lawyers (^{<215>}Luke 11:45): “*Are we blind also? Darest thou say that we are blind, whose judgment every one has such a veneration for, values, and yields to?*” Note, Nothing fortifies men's corrupt hearts more against the convictions of the word, nor more effectually repels them, than the good opinion, especially if it be a high opinion, which others have of them; as if all that had gained applause with men must needs obtain acceptance with God, than which nothing is more false and deceitful, for God sees not as man sees.

III. Christ's answer to this cavil, which, if it did not convince them, yet silenced them: *If you were blind you should have no sin; but now you say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth.* They gloried that they were not blind, as the common people, were not so credulous and manageable as they, but would *see with their own eyes*, having abilities, as they thought, sufficient for their own guidance, so that they needed not any body to lead them. This very thing which they gloried in, Christ here tells them, was their shame and ruin. For,

1. *If you were blind, you would have no sin.*

(1.) “If you had been really ignorant, your sin had not been so deeply aggravated, nor would you have had so much sin to answer for as now you have. If you were blind, as the poor Gentiles are, and many of your own poor subjects, from whom you have taken the key of knowledge, you would have had comparatively *no sin.*” The times of ignorance God *winked at*; invincible ignorance, though it does not justify sin, excuses it, and lessens the guilt. It will be more tolerable with those that perish for lack of vision than with those that *rebel against the light.*

(2.) “If you had been sensible of your own blindness, if when you would see nothing else you could have seen the need of one to lead you, you would soon have accepted Christ as your guide, and then you would *have had no sin*, you would have submitted to an evangelical righteousness, and have been put into a justified state.” Note, Those that are convinced of their disease are in a fair way to be cured, for there is not a greater hindrance to the salvation of souls than self-sufficiency.

2. “*But now you say, We see*; now that you have knowledge, and are instructed out of the law, your sin is highly aggravated; and now that you have a conceit of that knowledge, and think you see your way better than

any body can show it you, *therefore your sin remains*, your case is desperate, and your disease incurable.” And as those are most blind who *will not see*, so their blindness is most dangerous who fancy they do see. No patients are so hardly managed as those in a frenzy who say that they are *well*, and nothing ails them. The sin of those who are self-conceited and self-confident *remains*, for they reject the gospel of grace, and therefore the guilt of their sin remains unpardoned; and they forfeit the Spirit of grace, and therefore the power of their sin remains unbroken. *Seest thou a wise man in his own conceit? Hearest thou the Pharisees say, We see? There is more hope of a fool, of a publican and a harlot, than of such.*