

John 8 Sin in Those Supposed Sinless

07/25/05

Context

We are in ch. 7-10, the third segment of the gospel set in Jerusalem (“he came unto his own”), and by far the longest so far. It has three main segments, each beginning with an interview that points up the issue of sin, then followed by a discourse during which an attempt is made against the Lord.

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Reference to Sin</i>	<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Threat</i>
7:1-13, His Brethren	7:7 “the works thereof are evil”	7:14-8:1, His offer, and three errors people make about him.	7:30, “they sought to take him” (cf. 32)
8:2-11, The Adulterous Woman:	8:7 “he that is without sin”—sin is where it is not expected (the rulers).	8:12-59, Jesus as the I Am.	8:59, “then took they up stones to cast at him”
9:1-39, The Blind Man	Sin is not where it is expected. 9:3 “neither this man sinned, nor his parents” 9:25 “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”	9:40-10:42, Jesus as the Good Shepherd and one with the Father.	10:31 “then the Jews took up stones again to stone him”

Now we consider the second of these segments, focusing on the sinfulness of the Jewish rulers.

A distinctive feature of this chapter is its extensive use of the term “father.” The chapter in the Bible that uses this word the most is Gen 27 (Isaac with Jacob and Esau), but this is next, followed by John 14 (the upper room discourse). A main focus here is the Lord’s relation to his father.

The story about the adulterous woman has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion. It does not appear in the oldest mss. Modern critics are almost unanimous that while it may be scripture, it does not belong here. However, it was known to some of the earliest church fathers (Jerome and Augustine, in the early 400’s, earlier than the oldest mss), and is represented in the majority of the mss preserved for us. It fits with the overall pattern of these chapters in using a personal interview to introduce a broader discourse. And there is good reason for someone to have excised it from an early copy—Augustine mentions that people were concerned that wives might use it to justify immorality. We will accept it without question as part of John’s text. The first two verses are a natural conclusion to ch. 7, and it forms an excellent conclusion to the previous chapter and introduction to this one.

Relation to the previous chapter:

- Nicodemus calls for a formal investigation before condemning Jesus (7:51), and the appearance of the “scribes” in 8:3 (only here in John) with a formal demand for the Lord’s position on a legal case suggests that the Jews are trying to accommodate him.
- The Jewish address to the Lord as “Master” (v.4) recalls Nicodemus’ approach in 3:2, and

reinforces the connection with him.

- The return of everyone to his own house (7:53) is a fitting end to the feast of booths, when people lived in temporary structures rather than their homes. (After dismissing the pericope summarily--“The textual evidence makes it impossible to hold that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel”--Morris goes on to argue, in introducing 8:12, that “the Feast was over and the crowd had gone home,” which is exactly what the “impossible” section states!)

Correspondences between the interview and the discourse

- early in the morning (2), as the sun was rising—he then proclaims himself the light of the world (12)
- 5 is the first reference to stoning; by the end of the chapter (59) they seek to stone Jesus, and this is a continuing theme through the next few chapters (10:31, 32, 33; 11:8).
- Emphasis on the sin of the Jewish leaders: 7, 9, 21, 44 and often
- With the pharisees’ proposal to stone the woman, cf. the Lord’s threat that “ye shall die in your sins,” 21.
- Jesus is the lawgiver, writing with his finger (6), whose word must be kept (51, 52, 55)

Continuity with ch. 7

The point of ch. 7 is how people (and the Jewish leaders in particular) seek to judge Jesus: he is not educated, he does not have political support, he comes from the wrong place. Their attempt to judge him comes to a head in 8:2-11, when they bring scribes to examine him on a technical legal point. But he turns the tables and becomes their judge, a theme that continues throughout ch. 8 and that he already announced in ch. 5.

To this day, most people approach Jesus as though they were sitting in judgment on him. They review arguments pro and con for his deity, his resurrection, the relevance of his teaching on daily life, and if he meets their standards, they accept him. True salvation comes when we understand that he is judging us, and not the other way around. The great offer at the center of 7, vv. 37-39, does not say, “If you agree that I am the Messiah, come unto me and drink.” It says, “If any man thirst,” if any man recognizes that he is under judgment, “come unto me.”

2-11, The Interview

2, The Setting: Growing Popularity

2 early in the morning.--This is now the day after the feast of Tabernacles. The temple’s big celebration is over. You would think that after a full day of celebration capping a full week, people would be tired and might want to sleep in. Their spiritual thirst is so great that they gather early. Recall Neh 8:3, where the people gathered from first light to hear the word of God.

all the people came unto him.--Recall his invitation in 7:37. Apparently, many people stayed over the next day to take him up on it. The feast, for all its pageantry and splendor, has left them empty, and

they now turn to him for the living water he offered them.

3-6a, The Trap

The Jewish offensive here is likely rooted in Nicodemus' challenge in 7:51. He pointed out that their own standards require a person to be confronted directly, so they bring their legal experts and challenge the Lord.

3 scribes and Pharisees.--Both groups of Jewish leaders are mentioned extensively in the synoptics, but this is the only verse in John to mention the scribes. This does not mean that John did not write the verse (any more than the solitary mention of "lawyers" in Matt 22:35 means that he did not write that verse). Rather, this is the only passage in John where the Jews challenge Jesus concerning the law of Moses, probably based on Nicodemus' rebuke. So it is appropriate for them to bring scribes specially trained in the law to lead the debate. Elsewhere in John it is Jesus, the Logos, who takes the lead in challenging them concerning the law (7:19, 23; 8:17; 10:34; 15:25).

they had set her in the midst.--We are to envision the Lord surrounded by the people who had come to teach him. Into the midst of this gathering the scribes and Pharisees intrude themselves, dragging the poor wench.

4 Master.--That is, "teacher," the Greek translation of Rabbi. Usually it is someone's disciples who come addressing him as "master" or "rabbi" (cf. 1:38; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8; and 20:16). Only twice in John do the Jews address him thus: here and (Nicodemus in) 3:2. Perhaps Nicodemus has coached them on how to approach the Lord. But he seems to have been to some degree receptive. The Jews here, by contrast, are totally hypocritical. Their purpose is to trap him (v.6), but they pretend to be respectful and deferential.

See Job 32:21,22 for Elihu's resolve with regard to such honorary titles:

21 Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. 22 For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away.

Such flattery has no place with God's people: 1 Thes 2:5, "neither at any time used we flattering words."

this woman was taken ... in the very act.--Their claim is necessary for insisting on the death penalty, which required two witnesses. But it has some implications.

1. Given the private nature of the offense, she must have been entrapped, caught in a set-up.
2. There should be two people brought before the Lord, for if she was caught in the act, the man's identity must also have been known.

5 Moses ... commanded us, that such should be stoned.--The reference is to Deut 22:22,

If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

The Mosaic law was extremely stern on matters of immorality. It is interesting that people who advocate capital punishment because of the Biblical example, would be very slow to advocate it for the offenses to which it was applied in the Bible.

but what sayest thou?--Their question implicitly puts him in opposition to Moses. "Moses says this; what do you say?"

6 This they said, tempting him.--They are trying to get the Lord into trouble by presenting a question to which either answer will hurt him.

- If he says that she should be stoned, the people around him are likely to rise up and carry out the verdict. Stoning was just that kind of spontaneous, popular judgment: cf. Stephen in Acts 7, or the Lord in Nazareth in Luke 4:28-29, or the uprisings against the Lord later in this chapter (8:59; 10:31). But it was also illegal. When the Jews more deliberately move against Jesus, they persuade the Romans to kill him, because "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (18:31). So if he agrees with Moses and a riot ensues, they will be able to "accuse" him to the authorities.
- If he says that she should not be stoned, he will be contradicting the law of Moses. They will have put down Nicodemus' impertinent question, provided a basis for his own condemnation, and embarrassed him before the people.

6b-9, The Answer

The Lord responds in two ways: by his action, and by his words.

- His actions constitute a claim on his part to be the lawgiver
- His words bring them under judgment

Jesus ... with his finger wrote.--The first part of his response takes the form of a symbolic action.

Commentators have long speculated on what it was that the Lord wrote: their names (Jer 17:13)? their sins? Exod 23:1b, 7? In fact, John does not tell us what Jesus wrote. It is the action itself, not the content, to which he draws our attention. That action is a clear reflection of an OT image, in Exod 31:18, when God wrote the law with his finger. God actually did it two times (again after the destruction of the original tablets, in 34:1-4, 28), just as the Lord Jesus here writes twice. His action seems to convey two messages:

1. It was not Moses who gave you this commandment, but God. Moses was only the messenger.
2. By writing with his finger, he is taking on the role of God, just as in ch. 5 he insisted, "my father worketh hitherto, and I work." He is indeed superior to Moses; he is in fact the giver of the law of which Moses was the custodian.

7 he ... said unto them.--The second part of his response is a spoken word. They had asked him, "Moses said this; what do you say [about this woman]?" His response is, "I am a greater lawgiver than Moses, and I want to draw your attention to a sin greater than that of this woman—your sin."

He that is without sin among you.--The Lord is not saying that absolute sinlessness is necessary on the part of a judge. It is better to understand his reference to her specific sin. "How many of you are innocent in this case?" The law requires the man as well as the woman to be executed. Where is the man? How did he escape? Was he in cooperation with them, seducing the woman to set up the test case? Was he in fact standing among them now?

More generally, he may have been challenging their own sexual purity. How many of them were

innocent of the sin of which they accused the woman?

9 they ... being convicted ... went out.--His words hit home. None of them could claim innocence. Utterly deflated, they creep away.

Beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.--Those most highly ranked among them were smitten first and hardest by their consciences. Perhaps they had had more time to sin, and had become more hardened in their wickedness.

Alone ... in the midst.--The Lord was "alone" with respect to the Jewish leaders, not with respect to the people, in whose "midst" the woman continued standing.

10-11, The Woman

The Lord's words to the woman have been misunderstood as excusing adultery. They do nothing of the sort. Note two details.

where are those thine accusers?--The law required two eyewitnesses to put someone to death. With her accusers gone, the required basis for judicial condemnation is not there. It would have been unjust for the Lord to condemn her in such circumstances. "Condemn" here means to sentence her to the judgment prescribed by Moses.

11 go, and sin no more.--By these words the Lord shows that he does not excuse her sin. She has indeed sinned, and that sin is wrong. She should forsake it.

We are in a similar position to that of the woman.

- We have sinned.
- We are delivered from condemnation, not because our sin doesn't matter, but because of a legal technicality. In the woman's case, the technicality is that the required eyewitnesses are not found. In our case, the technicality is that a substitute has already borne our punishment, and it would be unjust of God to demand payment from us as well.
- Like the woman, we are expected to "sin no more." Salvation is not a license to live as we please. Having received the Lord's forgiveness, we are expected to live righteous lives, motivated by love for the Lord, and empowered by his Holy Spirit.

12-56, The Discourse

The discourse differs in two ways from that in ch. 7.

- It is with the Pharisees, while the previous chapter involved the people at large. Either this is later in the day than the discussion with the woman and some of them have returned, or (more likely) there were some of them in the crowd watching.
- There, the point was that the existing religious system kept people from acknowledging the Lord. Here, the focus is on their sin as the obstacle.
- Jesus takes the initiative in the first three exchanges, as opposed to responding to questions from others. He is in control of the discussion. This observation is the basis for dividing the

discourse into two parts, 12-51 (where the theme is following Jesus) and 52-56 (Jesus' superiority to Abraham).

12-51, Following Jesus

The big theme here is following Jesus. We can identify the paragraphs by where the speakers are named and by places where people simply “say” rather than “answer and say.” The leading verses of each paragraph picture Jesus as leading and others as following (or not).

- 12-20, cf. v. 12, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"
- 21-29, cf. v. 21, "whither I go, ye cannot come"
- 30-51, cf. v. 31, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The first and third sections present the benefits that will accrue:

- 12, have light of life
- 31-32, be free
- 51, never see death.

We might expect that John would be urging people to follow Jesus. In fact, the second section introduces the idea that unsaved people *cannot* follow him. The third section develops this more fully, in light of their parentage. Following Jesus requires a new birth, as the Lord told Nicodemus in ch. 3.

12-20, The Need to Follow

Jesus makes an offer: follow me and receive light. The Jews focus not on the offer, but on his credentials to offer it. First, they challenge his self-witness. When he adduces the Father as support, they question where he is (not realizing that it is God the Father).

His offer presents a problem and a solution.

12 walk in darkness.--This is the problem. When it's dark out, it's difficult to get somewhere. There are two problems. First, you can't see obstacles, and trip over them. A flashlight, a light that you carry, can help with this first problem, but not with the second: it's easy to wander off, if you don't know every step of the trail.

Isa 59:11, Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

This is the challenge we all face. We live in a hostile and unfamiliar world, and if we rely on our own understanding, we will surely end up lost, with bumped shins.

I am the light of the world.--The real solution to darkness is not a flashlight that lights up a little area around us, but the rising of the sun, which illumines all of the earth. Malachi had prophesied that the Messiah would be such a light, “the sun of righteousness,” and here the Lord claims to be this light.

John 8

Recall from 8:2 that the interview with the woman and the Jews began “early in the morning.” Now, as the sun rises over the Mount of Olives, he uses it as a metaphor for himself.

he that followeth me.--You can still get lost, even when the sun is shining, if you don't know the way. Here the Lord claims to be more than just a source of illumination. He is a guide, who will lead us through life.

Compare his offer here with 7:37,38: come to me for the water, follow me for the light. Water gives us life, but light enables us to be productive. Having the living water is only part of the solution. We need the light too.

Light of life.--He wants to make the meaning of his metaphor clear.

- The physical loaves he multiplied in ch. 6 were meant to point them to “the bread of life,” vv. 35, 46, which could give eternal life.
- The physical water poured out at Tabernacles in ch. 7 was meant to point them to “living water,” v. 38, which would satisfy far more than physical thirst.
- So now, with the rising physical sun as his example, he promises them a light that will lead them to life.

13 The Pharisees.--The Pharisees don't want to admit their need of leadership or talk about Jesus' offer, so they change the subject. Instead of talking about what Jesus said, they turn the focus on Jesus himself.

Their statement shows how they view themselves. If you are wandering in the dark and someone offer you light, you ask for it. “Show me your light. Help me.” But they still see themselves as the judges, just as they were in vv. 2-11. They are the ones who really understand what's going on. Their objection has nothing to do with the subject of Jesus' speech. It is a formal legal requirement. In a court of law, a person's testimony concerning himself is insufficient. He needs witnesses.

14 Jesus ... “Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true”.--He tries to shift their attention from their role as judges to their condition as lost wanderers. Self-testimony may not be admissible legally, and yet it may still be true. People too often reject what the Lord says because it does not satisfy their self-imposed standards of acceptability, without considering the content.

Morris: “Light establishes its claim. It does so, not by arguments, but by shining. Light must always be accepted for itself, and that notwithstanding the arguments of the blind.”

Nevertheless, he gives them three reasons to accept his claim: his knowledge, his mission, and his witness.

I know ... ye cannot tell.--He gently reminds them of his superior **knowledge**. Like any good guide, he knows the path. They do not. This is surely an indispensable condition for claiming to lead others. By contrast, they are “blind leaders of the blind,” Matt 15:14.

15 Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.--The Lord is not denying his mission to be the judge; that was made clear in ch. 5. But in his first advent, his **mission** is on salvation, not judgment:

12:47, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”

3:17, “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through

him might be saved.”

They want to engage in a legal debate. His focus is not on this kind of discourse. It's on solving the real problems that people have.

16 I am not alone.--Yet even in terms of their law, they must recognize the force of a **witness**. He invokes his Father as his witness.

17 the testimony of two men is true.--Actually, the law requires “two witnesses,” Deut 17:6; 19:15, not “two men.” The Lord changes the quotation to offer an *a fortiori* argument. “You accept the witness of two humans. The witness I offer you is the witness of the divine Father and his son, which is far greater.” He is returning to the line of argument in 5:31-47, where he claimed the Father as his greatest witness.

19 Where is thy Father?.--In 5:18, when the Lord spoke of his Father, the Jews recognized that he was speaking of God. Here they do not. Their understanding seems to have slipped. They think he wants to bring a human parent to attest to his claims, just as they will later ask parents of the man born blind for a deposition (9:18).

Ye neither know me, nor my Father.--Compare v. 14. Their failure to recognize him carries its own condemnation. This is the point of Morris' observation about the self-authenticating nature of light: if you say you don't see it, you condemn yourself.

20 These words spake Jesus in the treasury.--Edersheim equates this with the court of the women, because that is where the offering boxes, or “trumpets,” were located. Women could go no further than this. It is interesting that the Lord taught in a place where women as well as men could listen. Compare the congregation that gathers to hear Ezra in Neh 8.

his hour was not yet come.--The time is coming when the Jews will take him, but that will only happen on the Father's schedule. Until then he is secure, regardless of the hostility of men.

21-30, The Hindrance to Following

The first paragraph was an offer to follow Jesus. The Jews didn't want to talk about the offer. Instead, they changed the subject to argue about the credentials of the one making the offer. The Lord doesn't plead with them to follow him. Instead, he now says that because of their sinfulness, they cannot follow him.

21 I go my way.--He isn't going to stop leading just because they don't believe in him. The sun doesn't stop shining just because some people are blind and can't see it.

ye shall seek me.--He repeats his point from 7:34. After he is gone, they will long for the Messiah. The period after the crucifixion of Christ, and in particular after the fall of the temple, was marked with false Messiahs. Compare Gamaliel's comments in Acts 5:36-37 about Theudas and Judas of Galilee. One of the most prominent was Simon bar Kochba, who led an unsuccessful rebellion against the Romans about AD 132-135.

ye ... shall die in your sins.--This is stronger than in 7:34, which simply said, “ye shall not find me.” Men's efforts to find salvation on their own terms are doomed to failure. The Jews reject the true Messiah and go looking for one of their liking. People today reject the Bible and make up their own standards of religion. These self-efforts are doomed, because people are sinners, and the wages of sin is

death. Condemned sinners cannot climb up to a holy God. He must condescend to forgive them.

Note here that he continues the theme introduced in 8:7. They are not the judges; he is. They have accused him on a technical point of law of not having sufficient witnesses. He strikes to the heart of their moral standing before a holy God. Not only does their sin disqualify them from judging the woman; it condemns them to death.

Unlike many modern preachers, the Lord does not shrink from confronting people with their sin. In fact, it is at the heart of his presentation. He forced the woman at the well to confront her adultery. Now he forces the religious leaders to confront their sin. Far from driving them away, it even brings some of them to a preliminary stage of belief (v. 30).

whither I go, ye cannot come.--The door to heaven is barred to sinners. They cannot enter it on their own terms.

22 Will he kill himself?--In 7:35, they thought he would go among the Gentiles. Here, they think he will kill himself. In both cases, they attribute his promised inaccessibility to something he does, not to their own condition. They are evading his pointed accusation. He wants to focus them on “**ye cannot come,**” but they choose to emphasize “**whither I go.**” This is a common reaction of people when confronted with the biblical teaching of sin and judgment. They prefer to complain that God is inaccessible, rather than facing their own responsibility.

23 Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.--Here is the fundamental reason that he can show them what they cannot find themselves. He is heavenly, they are earthly. Like much of John's gospel, this verse echoes Paul:

1 Cor 15:44-49 There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

As descendants of Adam, we are worldly, earthly. We cannot see the heavenly light; Paul describes us as blinded by Satan, 2 Cor 4:4. We desperately need to follow Jesus, but because of our sin, we cannot.

24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins.--The judge presses the accusation. They must face the fact that they are sinners, and the consequence, which is death. This is the default condition of all people. We are from beneath, of this world, sinners, and we must die. But the Lord offers an alternative.

if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.--The Lord connects their condemned state to their denial of who he is.

I am he.--The Greek expression is actually only “I am,” *ego eimi*. The point is not that they need to believe that he is the Messiah, or the light of the world. He is setting forth a far loftier title.

John uses this expression more than any other NT writer (24x; it appears only 24x in the rest of the NT, and no one else uses it more than 7x). It is part of the LXX's translation of the divine name in Exod 3:14, and a common translation for the Hebrew *ani hw'*, which always refers to the Lord when it

appears (as here) without complement (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10,13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6). In Isa 45:8, 18, the LXX uses the expression either to paraphrase or to replace the divine name YHWH. Thus it is part of the Lord's claim to be not just Messiah, but also God.

Again, John is substantiating Paul. Compare 1 Cor 12:3, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." The natural man cannot recognize who Jesus is; such recognition is evidence of the Spirit's work.

25 Who art thou?--They should have recognized the echo of the LXX in the Lord's claim to be the "I am," just as in v. 19 they should have recognized that he was speaking of his heavenly Father. But their blindness keeps them from seeing beyond the physical world.

Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.--The Greek expression here is very difficult, and has generated much discussion.

Our version takes it as an expression of exasperation: "I've told you already, and it hasn't changed." The Lord does not cast his pearls before swine. When they show themselves hardened, he does not try to elaborate. So we should be careful not to try to "prove" people into the kingdom of God. We sow the seed, and it is up to the Spirit to cause it to germinate. Where he is not working, our best arguments will not have any effect.

But it's likely that the meaning is more subtle, and that we should translate the clause, "In principle, I am what I say to you" (cf. Alford). He has called himself the "I am," recalling God's identification of himself to Moses as "I am that I am." He is the Logos, the revelation of God, and might very well say, "I am that I speak." His words are the essence of who he is—the manifestation of the Father.

26 I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.--He knows more than he will reveal to them. He does not tell them everything; compare Prov 29:11, "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." There are "secret things" that the Lord chooses not to reveal until the time is right.

There can be different reasons for his reticence. Compare 16:12-13,

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."

- There, the reason for not speaking more is the disciples' incapacity to bear them, without the Holy Spirit.
- Here, it is that the Father has not authorized him to release the information.

The difference is 15:15. We are the Lord's friends. In this special relation, we are permitted to know whatever the Father has revealed to him.

27 They understood not.--Once again, we are reminded of the blindness of the Jews—and indeed, of any natural person apart from the work of the Spirit of God.

28 When ye have lifted up the Son of man.--According to 12:32, 33, this image refers to his death upon the tree. The term recalls the conversation with Nicodemus in ch. 3, where in v. 14 he first spoke of being lifted up. Nicodemus' challenge in 7:51 led to bringing of the woman in 8:2-11, and perhaps he is still among the group with whom the Lord is speaking.

then shall ye know.--The Lord is not predicting their salvation. He is saying that after they have

confirmed their rejection by crucifying him, they will too late come to the realization that what he has said is true.

- When they see him exalted in judgment, they will recognize that he is the “I am.”
- When they see the Ancient of Days assign all authority to him (Daniel 7), they will recognize that he does act under the authority of the Father.

29 And he that sent me is with me.--The Lord returns to his claim of v. 16, that he is not acting alone. This verse may correspond to vv. 20, 59. As the Lord increases his accusation of the Jews, their opposition and hatred intensifies, but they cannot touch him, because he is under the Father's protection.

30 As he spake these words, many believed on him.--Some are paying attention. Perhaps Nicodemus is among them.

Pisteuw eis is distinctive to John (34x in the gospel and 3x in 1 John, out of 45 in the entire Greek Bible).

This is a very encouraging outcome. Believing on Jesus is the way that we receive him (1:12), and carries the promise of eternal life (3:16; 6:40). It is the result of a divine work (6:29), and guarantees that a person will never thirst (6:35), but will have a fountain of living water within (7:38), that is, the indwelling Holy Spirit (7:39). One who believes on Jesus will be raised from the dead (11:25) or raptured at the Lord's return (11:26). He will not dwell in darkness (12:46). He will do greater works than the Lord Jesus (14:12).

Yet there are shortcoming among those who believe: the Lord does not commit himself to them (2:23-24), some of them are unwilling to confess him (12:42), and here, he tells them that their father is the devil (v. 44)! How are we to reconcile these apparently contradictory statements?

Hendriksen appears to have discovered the clue. The promises are all associated with the **present tense** of the verb “to believe,” while the shortcomings are all associated with people who are said to have believed **in the past**. A momentary or temporary assent to the teachings of Christ has no claim on eternal blessings. True faith continues, and that is the very point that the Lord makes in the next verse.

31-51, Fathers and Following

The Lord has presented the Jews with a puzzle. He offers the light of life to all who will follow him, but then he says that they cannot follow him because of their sin. This paragraph brings these two together, using the metaphor of parentage. Their sinfulness is linked to their being the children of the devil. The implication is what he said explicitly to Nicodemus in ch. 3: new life is only available for those who are born again, who become the children of God.

This is the longest of the three interchanges (21 vv, compared with 9 and 10, respectively), and includes more turns (4.5, compared with 2 and 3, respectively—a turn consists of one statement each by the initiator and the responder).

In each turn of the conversation, the participants touch on a certain limited set of themes: belief, freedom, parentage, and sin. This table shows how these develop:

Note that the Jews introduce the theme of parentage, and once they have it firmly in their teeth, refuse to talk about anything else. The Lord repeatedly tries to bring them to confront their sin, but they seem incapable of conceiving that they have such a need. Finally, he insists that they do not believe after all (45, 46).

31-32, Jesus: Continue in my word and become free

In this section, the Lord picks up the theme of their belief from v.30 and relates it to their need for freedom.

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him.-- “Believed on him” is not the same idiom as in v. 30. but simply *pisteuw* followed by the dative. Whenever it appears in John (4:21; 5:46; 6:30; 8:45, 46; 10:37; 14:11), it has the sense of acknowledging the truth of what one says. It is never associated with any promise of eternal value, as is *pisteuw eis*. This alerts us that the belief of these Jews is not yet where it needs to be.

If ye continue in my word.--Here again is the theme of following Jesus. Note the temporal sequence implied by the tenses of the verbs. Here are four events: Continue in Jesus' words, be a true disciple, know the truth, become free. The order in which they are named is not necessarily the order in which they happen. Note which ones have and haven't happened.

- “Know the truth” and “become free” are future.
- “Continue” is contingent. He doesn't say that they have continued, but challenges them to do so. So we should see that as lying ahead as well.
- “Then are ye my disciples indeed” is the only thing in the sequence that is present tense, not future. He does not say, “If you continue in my word, then shall you be my disciples indeed.” Continuing in his word does not *make* them his disciples; it shows that they already *are* his disciples.

So the sequence is,

1. Become his disciple. Some of the Jews have claimed this position by believing on him in v. 30.
2. Show the genuineness of that decision by continuing in his word.
3. Learn the truth
4. Become free

Continue in my word.--The idea of “continuing” *menw* is central to John. John (J 40x, 1J 24x, 2J 2x, Rev 1x) accounts for nearly a third of the occurrences in the Greek Bible, far more than any other book

	<i>Belief</i>	<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Sin</i>
31-32, Jesus	X	X		
33, Jews		X	X	
34-38, Jesus	X	X	X	X
39a, Jews			X	
39b, Jesus			X	X
41b, Jews			X	
42-47, Jesus	X		X	X
48, Jews			X	
49-51, Jesus	X	X	X	X

John 8

(the much longer book of Isaiah is next, with only 15x). It is the word used in 15:4, “abide in me, and I in you.”

What does it mean to “continue in [someone's] word”? “Continue in” governs several kinds of objects in the Bible.

- Most commonly and literally, a place, 7:9; 8:35; 11:6; Acts 9:43; 27:31; 2 Tim 4:20
- A state of being, 1 John 3:14 (death), cf. Ecc 7:15 (evil)
- A movement or religion, 2 Mac 8:1; 1 Tim 2:15
- A person, 15:4, 5, 6, 7; 1 John 2:28; 4:16
- Jesus' love, 15:9,10
- things that dwell in us: God's love (1 John 3:17), Anointing (1 John 2:27), Jesus (1 John 3:24; John 15:4, 5); Jesus' words (John 15:7); God (1 John 4:16), the truth (2 John 2)

Three times, someone is said to abide in a word or teaching: here and 2 Tim 3:14; 2 John 9.

- 2 Tim 3:14, one who continues in what one has learned is contrasted with (*su de*) evil men and seducers.
- 2 John 9 (abiding in the doctrine of Christ is contrasted with transgressing and not having the Father or the Son).

Clearly, to continue in a word or teaching means to follow it steadfastly, to stick with it and do what it says, rather than turning away. It is contrasted, not with a sufficient but shallow faith, but with transgressing, being an evil person and a seducer. This idiom is the biblical expression of the doctrine commonly called the “perseverance of the saints.” True saints abide in Christ. True disciples will abide, continue, persevere in the faith.

We are called to be followers of Jesus. Salvation does not consist in making a point decision at one time, but in continuing to follow the Lord. Note the contrast between the past tense that describes the Jews (“which believed on him”) and the requirement for them to continue to follow him. “To him that overcometh” is promised the tree of life, freedom from the second death, white raiment and a place in the book of life, rule with Christ, and a share in eternal riches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7).

then are ye my disciples indeed.--“Disciple” (261x) is the most common noun in the NT to describe a follower of Jesus. It means someone who seeks to learn from a teacher. “Believer” only appears 2x (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim 4:12).

What is the relation between believing and being a disciple? 2:11 says that those who were already disciples, believed. But this does not mean that they did not believe in the first place. Compare 1 John 5:13, which speaks of those who already believe as subsequently believing.

Interestingly, “Disciple” appears only in the gospels and Acts. In the rest of the NT, the dominant term is “saint” (62x), which appears only once in the gospels (Matt 27:52, in reference to the OT believers), 4x in Acts, and then 57x later. “Disciple” emphasizes what we do in following the Lord. “Saint” emphasizes what God does to us, setting us apart.

Several details need attention.

John 8

- The word “indeed” (“truly”): the Lord does not say, “then are ye my disciples,” but “then are ye my disciples indeed.” All those who associate themselves with the Lord would be described by others as his disciples; cf. 9:27, 28, but not all are truly learning from him. Those who had believed thought of themselves as disciples, but the Lord is saying that their discipleship is false, not true.
- The requirement to continue: they had assented to something the Lord said, but true discipleship means continuing to follow him.
- The tense of the verbs: “are my disciples,” not “shall be.” Continuing in his word does not make them his disciples, but shows that they already are. The order is: become his disciple, continue in his word.

Beware of teaching such as that of Tom Constable, who writes on this passage,

This verse is talking about discipleship, not salvation, and rewards, not regeneration.

The Bible consistently teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who perseveres within the believer keeping him or her securely saved. It does not teach that believers inevitably persevere in the faith but that believers can defect from the faith while remaining saved (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10, 16). It is the Savior who perseveres with the saints, not necessarily the saints who persevere with the Savior (2 Tim. 2:13).

Such teaching is contrary to the plain sense of the text, both here and elsewhere. The Lord's clear purpose is to warn superficial believers about the inadequacy of their decision.

32 And ye shall know the truth.--First, one becomes a disciple by receiving the Lord. Then one shows the genuineness of that decision by continuing in his word, living in ongoing obedience to it. The third step in the sequence is knowledge of the truth.

The idea that obedience precedes full knowledge is attested also in 7:17, “if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine”. This saying brings us back to v. 12. He does not say, “If you have light, follow me.” Rather, “if you follow me, you will have light.” Compare the order in Psa 34:8, “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Deep understanding of God's word comes not through meditation alone, as important as that is (Psa 1:2), but through obedience to the portions that we already understand. The more we submit to him, the more we learn. It is through use that our senses must be exercised to discern good and evil (Heb 5:14).

the truth shall make you free.--This saying, like the one with which the section ends in 51, brings us back to v. 12, guidance (light) to those who follow him. The truth in question, of courses, is not abstract philosophical inquiry, but the truth that the Lord came to manifest (1:14, 17). John uses “truth” 47x in his gospel and epistles, more than any other book in the Greek Bible (Ps is next at 40).

This wonderful offer contrasts starkly with a motto that the Germans placed over the entrances of several of their concentration camps, “work makes free” (arbeit macht frei). The only freedom that labor brought in those hellish places was death, which delivered its subjects from the oppression of the Third Reich, but could do nothing to deliver them from God's just judgment. Few unbelievers would want to endorse the concentration camps, but in fact they have embraced the same philosophy, that our own hard work can deliver us from whatever problems we have. The repeated testimony of Scripture is that true freedom comes only through hearing, understanding, and believing God's revelation.

In the sequel, the Lord will make clear that the freedom of which he speaks is freedom from sin. With this in mind, it is important to understand what is being claimed here. Freedom from sin is the result of a process of engagement with the Word of God. Even true disciples are not initially free from sin. Contrast:

	<i>Discipleship</i>	<i>Freedom from Sin</i>
Nature	Binary—you either are or are not	Continuum
Temporal	Point in time	Result of a process
Mechanism	Receiving the Lord	Engagement with his word

33, Jews: We don't need freedom, because Abraham is our father.

The Jews pick up on the theme of freedom, and introduce that of parentage, which (as we will see in the sequel) is the only thing they really care about.

33 We be Abraham's seed.--Like too many people today, they think that spiritual status can be inherited from human parents. Here is the great error of infant baptism, which defends itself by comparison with Jewish circumcision. The faith of the parent does not determine the faith of the child. Such people do not realize that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” 3:6, and cannot enter heaven, 8:23. What is needed is the new birth of which the Lord spoke to Nicodemus in ch. 3.

We ... were never in bondage.--Their statement is remarkable for two reasons.

1. The Jews had often been in bondage—to the Egyptians, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, Assyrian, Babylonians, and Syrians—and at this moment were subject to Rome. Few nations have been subjugated so often and so severely as the Jews. The very preface to the law in which they took so much pride stated that God brought them out of the house of bondage.
2. The relation of this false claim to Abraham is particularly striking, since at the very ceremony in which God established his covenant with Abraham, he said, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13).

Yet the Jews prided themselves in their freedom (see quotes in Morris). The world applauds this indomitable spirit in the underdog—but it is a mark of pride and a false claim to self-sufficiency. They had drifted from their biblical roots just as the Laodiceans would: “thou sayest, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing'; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17).

The Jews' response shows the defect in their faith. Their belief consists in thinking great things about Jesus, but not in recognizing their own need. They are not willing to confess their inadequacy apart from God's intervention. We are thus reminded of the importance of repentance to salvation.

How sayest thou.--The “thou” is emphatic. “You, of all people, with your messianic claims, shouldn't be talking about being in bondage.” The followers of Judah of Galilee, one of the false Messiahs cited by Gamaliel in Acts 5:36-37, “have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord.” (Josephus, Ant, 18:23). The expectation was that any true Messiah would

encourage the fleshly presumption to liberty, not insist that people were intrinsically in bondage.

34-38, Jesus: You do because of your sin, which derives from your father.

The Lord continues with freedom and parentage, but makes the issue of sin explicit. This is the point he wants to hammer home. He introduced it in the interview with the woman in 8:7, and the table shows that it is part of every utterance he makes in this paragraph.

This paragraph responds chiastically to the two claims the Jews made in v. 33. vv.35-37a respond to the claim to be Abraham's seed, while 34 and 37b-38 respond to the assertion that they are not in bondage.

34 Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.--He does not begin by accusing them directly of sin, but lays down a more general principle. This statement explains what he means by being free or in bondage. He is not speaking of a political condition, but of a moral one. Those who sin are servants. They think they are demonstrating their independence, but in fact they are showing that they are slaves to their own worldly passions.

Again, John preserves a saying of the Lord that lies behind Paul's teaching, in this case Rom 6:17, 20 (these three vv are the only places in the Greek Bible that use the expression *doulos ths hamartias*).

15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the **servants of sin**, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members **servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity**; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. 20 For when ye were the **servants of sin**, ye were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

35 the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.--Now the Lord turns to their claim of Abrahamic descent. He reminds them that Abraham had two sons, one (Ishmael) a slave and the other (Isaac) free. The time came when the slave was cast out (Gen 21:10-12). The Lord places them in the position of Hagar and Ishmael, and makes himself the antitype of Isaac.

Under Jewish law, servitude was only temporary, for seven years. There was a provision for a servant to have his ear bored and so become part of the household, but the Jewish sages taught that even one who had his ear bored was set free at the death of his master or the year of Jubilee (see Gill).

Being any kind of servant is a secondary position in the house of God, and it is significant that the Lord will nominate his followers "not servants but friends" (15:15). To be a servant of sin is even worse, and less secure.

This is another anticipation of Paul, Gal 4:22-31. In fact, the entire epistle of Galatians, with its great emphasis on Christian liberty, can be considered an exposition of John 8:34-35.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.--It is best to see the contrast

between Isaac and Ishmael continuing. He has declared them to be the antitypes of Ishmael, while he is the antitype to Isaac. Because they are the servants of sin, their destiny is to be cast out as Ishmael was, while he abides in the house. That was in fact what Sarah wanted. She is the one who demanded (Gen 21:10), “Cast out this bondwoman and her son.” Her motive was that her son should not have to share the inheritance: “for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.”

But now the Lord asks them to imagine that Isaac had spoken up on behalf of Ishmael. What if he had not silently accepted his mother's scheme to make him the sole heir, but instead had interceded for Ishmael? What if he had asked his father to remove the stigma of servitude from Ishmael and constitute Ishmael a full son? This is what the Lord has done for us. The heir intercedes for the slaves and invites them to share his inheritance.

37 ye are Abraham's seed.--He concedes their descent from Abraham, but will later question their legal status as children (39b).

but ye seek to kill me.--Now he turns back to their claim not to be in bondage. He asserted in 34 that anyone who sins is the servant of sin. Now he focuses in on their sin.

We have known their wicked intent toward him since 5:18. The Jews were covert about it; the general pilgrims at Tabernacles didn't know it (7:20), though the locals did (7:25). But the Lord sees the intents of the heart and discloses their inner plottings.

because my word hath no place in you.--Better, “does not move through you.” The verb describes the course of history in 2 Macc 3:40; 13:26; 15:37, and the movement of food through the body in Matt 15:17. It describes the moving of a report through an army in Herodian v.3.31 (Alford), and in Wisdom 7:23, 24, describes how wisdom moves through her hearers. The Lord is saying that his word does not enter, does not work, has no effect, takes no action in them. Their state is that of Heb 4:2, “the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” They are natural men, and so cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14). Intrinsicly, God's word is powerful and active (Heb 4:12), but it has no effect on a sinful, fleshly heart. Cf. vv. 43, 47, and 12:39,40.

This reference brings “belief” into this paragraph. It also, together with v. 31, completes the two-fold condition that comes up again in 15:7, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you ...”

38 I speak ... ye do.--He contrasts his position as the Son with theirs as Slaves, along two dimensions.

1. Their fathers are different (“my father ... your father”). They wanted to talk about paternity, so here he introduces the charge that he will make explicit in v.44. They are far more remote from him than Ishmael was from Isaac. Ishmael at least had the same father as Isaac, but they have a different father.
2. He speaks; they do. Where these verbs are paired and attributed to different people, typically speaking is the role of a superior, and doing is the role of an inferior. They saw themselves as the rulers of the people, speaking the words that governed the conduct of others. But compared to him, they are only doers, not commanders. He speaks as the representative of the Father, superior even to Moses, because he speaks what he has seen, while Moses was not permitted to see (Exod 33:20). They can only imitate the deeds of their father. Examples:
 - a) Gen 27:19, Jacob (pretending to be Esau) says to Isaac, “I have done as you told me”
 - b) At Sinai, the people said, “All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exod

24:3, cf. v.7)

- c) Exod 28:3, Moses speaks to the craftsmen, who then make (do) the tabernacle
- d) Exod 32:8, the levites did as Moses spoke to them
- e) Num 9:4, Moses speaks to the children of Israel, who then keep (do) the passover
- f) At his salvation, Saul is to go into Damascus, where “it shall be told thee what thou shalt do” (Acts 9:6; cf. 22:10).

39a, Jews: Abraham is our father

Abraham is our father.--Before, they focused on themselves: “we are Abraham's seed.” Now that the Lord is insisting on the contrast between his father and theirs, they shift the focus to their father, Abraham.

39b, Jesus: That's inconsistent with your sin

If ye were Abraham's children.--In v.37, he granted that they were the seed of Abraham, but now he questions that they are Abraham's children. Paul makes exactly the same contrast in Rom 9:7-8,

“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”,

ye would do the works of Abraham.--The Lord may have Gen 18:19 in mind. This key description of God's relation with Abraham shows that here, as in the New Covenant, his purpose is to evoke godliness in his people, not just to save them from destruction.

For I know him,

in order that

he will command his children and his household after him,
and they shall keep the way of the LORD,
to do justice and judgment;

in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Things to note here:

- “I know him” is knowledge of a person, not a fact. It describes a relationship, as in Rom 8:29, “whom he did foreknow.”
- The purpose of this special relationship (“in order that”) is the godliness of Abraham's descendants.

So if the Jews really were among his children, they would “do justice and judgment.”

40 But now ye seek to kill me.--This is the third time he has made this accusation directly to them. In all three cases, he emphasizes that their evil *deed* is at variance with the *word* to which they are accountable:

- 7:19, “Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?”

John 8

- 8:37, “ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.”
- Here, “ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God.”

Remember this linkage between murder and hatred of the truth. He will develop it further in v. 44.

this did not Abraham.--What is it that Abraham never did? Consider the three previous clauses, which might be the antecedent of “this.”

- It cannot be that he never heard from God. God often spoke with Abraham.
- Nor can it be that he never spoke the truth. He often built an altar and “called on the name of the Lord” among his pagan neighbors.
- Nor is the Lord claiming that Abraham never killed anyone. When Abraham delivered Lot from the four Mesopotamian kings in Gen 14, Moses records that “he smote them” (Gen 14:15), which in military contexts like this usually involves imposing casualties on the adversary.

It must be the entire clause that is contrasted with Abraham: receiving a truthful rebuke from God through another man without seeking to kill the messenger.

The Lord may have in mind two episodes in Abraham's wife where he meekly received rebuke.

- Gen 12:18, he received Pharaoh's rebuke concerning Sarah his wife, after the Lord smote Pharaoh with plagues. It seems that Pharaoh must have had some revelation from the Lord to recognize the connection between the plagues and his taking of Sarah.
- Gen 20:9, he received Abimelech's rebuke when he repeated the same error. This time the text is explicit that God spoke directly to Abimelech. If Abraham's private army was able to fight off four kings in ch. 14, surely he could have killed Abimelech if he were offended at the rebuke. But he meekly received the message.

Abraham knew that he was a sinful man. He did not try to deny the rebukes that others sometimes gave him, even when those others were unbelievers like Pharaoh and Abimelech. The Jews do not manifest this teachable, yielded spirit. Instead, they seek to destroy the one who rebukes them. In this, they demonstrate that they are not the children of Abraham.

Application: Being open to reproof is a mark of wisdom and a sign of the Spirit's work. Proverbs is full of warnings to those who reject correction. E.g., “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov 29:1). “Meekness” is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). We should always be willing to listen to the corrections that others offer us (even though sometimes we may need to consider the source).

41 Ye do the deeds of your father.--Since they do not behave like Abraham, their claim to be his children must be questioned. Someone else must be their true father, someone whose deeds resemble theirs.

Notice how the Lord does not start with the direct challenge of v. 44, but works up to it, to try to bring them to see the point for themselves.

41b, Jews: God is our father

We be not born of fornication.--“We” is emphatic as though they are making a contrast. “We have

heard stories about the irregularities in your birth. We are not illegitimate as you are.”

We have one Father, even God.--Perhaps they are beginning to grasp the force of his claim to God as his Father. They jump in and claim the same paternity. We are reminded that not all who claim God as their father really are his children, and the Lord calls them on this point.

42-47, Jesus: The devil is your father

Now the Lord makes explicit the contrast he has been hinting at all along, between his father and theirs. God is his father, but theirs is the devil. You can tell someone's descent by their behavior. In both cases, offspring are like their parents.

42, Jesus is the Son of God

42 If God were your Father, ye would love me.--Each time they claim a father, he challenges them with a test.

- If Abraham were your father, you would act like him (39)
- If God were your Father, you would love me (42)

The dynamics is the same in both cases. Offspring are like their parents. Abraham's true offspring do not strike out at those who rebuke them for their fault. God's offspring love those whom God loves.

It is important to note that he does not say, “If you love me, God will be your father.” The paternity comes first, then the love for the Lord Jesus. The new birth, the sovereign act of God in salvation, is what enables us to believe, to love the Lord, to obey him, and not *vice versa*. He closes this paragraph with a similar claim in v.47, “He that is of God heareth God's words.” The two characteristics in view, love and openness to the truth, recalls the linkage between murder and hatred for the truth in vv. 37 and 40. We are building to an understanding of why these two are linked.

Now the Lord makes three claims that set forth his relationship to God: his descent, his presence, and his submission

I proceeded forth ... from God.--In the LXX, the first expression, *ecerxomai ek qeou*, most commonly describes coming out from a place (the ark, a country, a house), but when it governs a person, it refers to descent: Gen 15:4; 17:6; 35:11; 46:26; 2 Sam 16:11; 2 Kings 20:18; 2 Chr 6:9; 32:29; Job 1:21; Isa 11:1; 48:1; Jer 1:5; 20:18; cf. Lev 15:16, 32. In the most direct terms, the Lord is here claiming to be the son of God just as Isaac was the son of Abraham. This was the promise of Psalm 2:7, “This day have I begotten thee.” “Son” is not just an honorary title or the result of adoption. It describes the result of a process of conception and birth.

I ... came from God.--The verb has the sense, “to have come and thus be present.” He is saying, “Here I am.” One could imagine that God has a son who stays far off in another place, obscure and irrelevant. But the Lord here claims to be present as the son of the highest. They must respond to him, and their response will have the greatest consequences.

Two OT passages that use this verb form may lie behind our Lord's use of this verb. Both declare the presence of the Lord's representative, and at the same time his submission to the one who has sent him, which is the third point that the Lord is about to make.

John 8

- Psa 40:7 (LXX 39:8), the Psalmist speaking to God, “Lo, I come.” This passage is quoted messianically in Heb 10:7,9. It goes on to assert (v. 8), “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”
- Num 22:38, the prophet Balaam speaking to Balak, “Lo, I am come unto thee.” Balak had summoned him to curse Israel, but he kept blessing them. His explanation follows: “Have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.” If there is an allusion here, it is *a fortiori*. If even the pagan prophet Balaam recognized that he was subject to God's control, how much more must the true Son of God?

neither came I of myself, but he sent me.--The Lord adds another important detail. If one who is the very son of God comes into the world, one could imagine that he would have the power to pursue his own agenda. Here the Lord repeats his frequent assertion that he is not autonomous, but comes on God's authority.

- 5:43, “I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”
- 7:28, “I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not.”

43-45, They are children of the Devil

Now the Lord turns from himself to a clear statement of their parentage.

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.--This vers two e makes two critically important for understanding what happens when we speak to unbelievers.

1. Unbelievers do not understand the gospel. Their lack of response in the first instance is due not so much to unwillingness as to lack of comprehension. We need to meet their rejection with compassion, not anger.
2. They are unable to hear it. Compare 2 Cor 4, where Paul says that Satan has blinded unbelievers to the truth. Physically, they can hear and see the words, but they are so shut off from them that they might as well be deaf and dumb.

Compare Paul's formulation of this same twofold principle in 1 Cor 2:14:

<i>John 8:43</i>	<i>2 Cor 2:14</i>
Why do ye not understand my speech?	The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:
Even because ye cannot hear my word.	neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Next, the Lord explains how this spiritual deafness comes about.

44 Ye are of your father the devil.--This is the counterpart to 42b. We might better translate, “You are from your father the devil.” Jesus is God's issue; they are the devil's.

the lusts of your father ye will do.--The parallel continues. Jesus was sent by the Father, and sought always to do those things that pleased him. They are subject to the desires of their father.

John 8

- “the lusts of your father,” what your father desires. The noun expresses a strong longing. It can be used in a positive sense (Phil 1:23; Luke 22:15; 2 Thes 2:17), but much more often has an evil sense, because the notion of uncontrollable desire is usually associated with bad things.
- “Ye will do” is not just future tense, but volitional: “what your father lusts after, you desire to do.” They are as wholeheartedly subject to their father as he is to his.

The Lord now sets forth two of the devil's lusts that distinguish him from Jesus' father and mark his offspring: murder and deception. He is picking up the linkage between hatred and disbelief that he has repeatedly alluded to in the previous verses.

He was a murderer from the beginning.--Jesus has been drawing their attention to their veiled plan to murder him, and now traces this back to Satan.

- He lured Adam and Eve into sin, in the face of God's warning that they would surely die, and thus instigated their spiritual death.
- It is prophesied of him that he would “bruise” Messiah's heel, Gen 3:15
- His title in Rev 9:11, Heb. Abaddon = Gk Apollyon, means “destroyer.”
- The Jews would have agreed with this characterization of the devil. In the apocrypha, Wis 2:24 says, “through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it,” and Philo (On Husbandry, xxii (97)) describes the Eve's serpent as “a plotter against man, designing destruction to a being better than itself, eager to kill with its poisonous but painless bite.”

God is the life-giver, the one who created and energized Adam and Eve. His son comes to give life (5:40; 10:10; 20:31).

The reference to the devil as a murderer, and its likely links to the serpent in the garden of Eden, is particularly appropriate if Nicodemus is in the audience, since the Lord earlier described himself to Nicodemus as the analog of the Moses' bronze serpent that could deliver people from the sting of the fiery serpents of Num 21.

and abode not in the truth.--Now he turns to Satan's second defining characteristic: deception. We have often remarked that truth is so much of God's essence that if his word does not conform to reality, reality itself changes (Gen 1; Isa 55:11). Satan's speech is, by contrast, deceitful. If it is not an outright lie (as it was to Eve in the garden), it is misleading and incomplete. As the intrinsically truthful Word of God, our Lord stands in stark contrast to Satan.

Compare the exhortation he gave them in v.31. He compares their transient belief with Satan's origin as a privileged cherub, Ezek 28:12ff (where “king of Tyre” is to be contrasted with “prince of Tyre,” v. 2, as the spiritual power behind the earthly monarch). He did not stand in the truth, but fell away; if they do not continue in the Lord's words, they will meet the same fate.

because there is no truth in him.--The reason that he “abode not in the truth” is that “there is no truth in him.” Having truth in us is the essential precondition for abiding in the truth. Being a true disciple is the precondition for continuing in Jesus' words.

When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.--That is, of his own treasures, the contents of his own heart. See the similar thought in Matt 12:34,35, where the Lord is again speaking to the Pharisees,

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. 35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

for he is a liar, and the father of it.--Not only is he deceitful, but he is the father of deception. He originated the practice. The very first lie in Scripture is on the lips of the devil in Gen 3:4, "ye shall not surely die." Up to that time we have only the searing truthfulness of God's creative speech, so true that reality conforms to it. All who ever lied since then have been following the devil's example.

45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.--Once again he brings the focus back to his hearers. The devil is a murderer, and they imitate him in desiring to kill Jesus. The devil is a liar, and they imitate him in refusing to believe the truth.

Application: We do well to remember these two characteristics of the devil, lest we be tempted to hatred and deception against our fellows. Desiring the death of another person, or representing the world to be other than it is, are not acceptable attitudes for the child of God. They show the lingering effects of Satan's influence on our race.

46-47 Summary

The Lord has pressed his adversaries on two aspects of their conduct: their murderous hatred and their disbelief. He has traced both of these to their father, the devil. Now he asks two questions, one dealing with each of these aspects, pleading with them to realize the true nature of their condition.

46 Which of you convinceth me of sin?--First, he addresses their murderous intention. "Convince" here is used in an archaic sense, where we would say "convict." If they could successfully convict him of sin, they would have an excuse for desiring his death. But they have been unable to do so. So their hatred must stem from another source, their father the devil.

And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?--Now he turns to their penchant for deception. If they could show that what he says is false, they would have grounds for not believing. But his word is true, so their unbelief must have another origin, their diabolical descent.

47 He that is of God heareth God's words.--This concluding claim echoes v. 42, "If God were your father, you would love me." The devil is a murderer and a liar, and his children are marked by hatred and unbelief. God is truthful and life-giving, and those who are his children love his son and receive his words.

ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.--Notice once again the causal direction. Hearing God's words does not make us children of God. It demonstrates that we are already of God.

48, Jews: Tu quoque

48 Then answered the Jews.--This is the first time they are named in their turn in the discourse. They are made more prominent because they are beginning to take the offensive, but their action is called an answer because the topic is still the respective parentage of themselves and Jesus.

thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?--He has invited them to convict him of sin and to submit to his teaching.

- Instead of convicting him of sin, they cast a vulgar slur on him: the Jews hated the Samaritans (see Gill), and calling someone a Samaritan was the ultimate slur 2 Kings 17:24ff suggests that the Samaritans were racially mixed; thus this charge may be related to their implication in 41b that his descent is questionable.
- Instead of submitting to his word, they accuse him of having a demon, and thus of being an unreliable witness. He gave a reasoned basis for saying that they were children of the devil, but they can only return the charge on his head. (Note that “the devil” in v. 44 is *diabolos*, Satan, while “a devil” in 48-49, 52 is *daimonion* “demon,” an evil spirit, but not the prince of darkness himself.)

49-51, Jesus: Choose between Judgment and Life

The Jews have degenerated into empty name-calling. It is instructive to see how the Lord responds to this. Often people call us names. Knowing how to respond in a Christ-like manner is important. The Lord here sets before them a choice between life (v. 51) and death (49-50), with the boundary marked by the emphatic “verily, verily” that introduces v. 51.

49-50, The Option of Judgment

49 I have not a devil.--“I” is emphatic; “I’m not the one with the devil.” He has accused them of being children of Satan. They have echoed his charge; he is simply repeating it here. “I’m not the one with the demon. You folk are.”

Curiously, he passes over the slur about being a Samaritan and responds only to the charge about having a devil. Why the distinction?

Calvin mentions (though does not accept) the explanation that he does not care about insults to his person, only those that challenge his doctrine. There is more to this point than Calvin perceives. In Mark 3: 22-31, he responds to a similar accusation, that he “hath Beelzebub,” paraphrased in v. 30 as “he hath an unclean spirit.” Our Lord calls this “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.” The spirit that indwells him is from Satan, but from God. In the parallel to this episode in Matt 12:24-32, the Lord says (v.32),

whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

The accusation that the lord was a Samaritan was an insult to him personally. It was never his way to defend himself. Isaiah 53:7 prophesied of him,

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

Peter observed (1 Pet 2:23) that he,

“when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:”

But the claim that he had a demon was a slur against the Spirit of God working through him. A slur

against his Father, he will not tolerate. The difference between his response to the two slurs illustrates the very point that he goes on to make.

If we read the next four clauses chiastically, they in fact present a response to both slurs. The first and fourth deal with the accusation that he has a devil, while the second and third deal with the personal accusation that he is a Samaritan. Again, the first and third describe his perspective, while the second and fourth describe theirs. Summary:

<i>Perspective</i>		<i>Accusation</i>
Jesus	49a I honour my Father	Thou hast a devil
The Jews	49b ye do dishonor me	Thou art a Samaritan
Jesus	50a I seek not my own glory	Thou art a Samaritan
The Jews	50b there is one that seeketh and judgeth	Thou hast a devil

We consider first the relation of these clauses to the accusations.

I honor my Father ... there is one that seeketh and judgeth.--As in Matthew and Mark, he is warning them here of the consequences of ascribing the works of God to Satan. This is the one unforgiveable sin, and they must remember that God will judge those who dishonor him. God's "seeking" is best understood as having the same object as the previous clause. That is, the Lord doesn't have to seek his own glory because God will seek it for him.

Ye do dishonor me, but I seek not my own glory.--Here is his response to the Samaritan slur. "You are trying to tear me down, but that doesn't matter to me, because I seek the Father's glory, not my own. In accusing me of being a Samaritan, you are aiming your arrows in the wrong direction. You can call me a Samaritan, or a pig, or anything you like. It means nothing to me. I'm not here to advance myself."

Now consider the two perspectives reflected in these four clauses.

I honour my Father ... 50 I seek not mine own glory.--This is Jesus' perspective. He is the subject of both clauses. He makes the same point in 7:18, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." Just as he speaks only what the Father gives him to speak (8:28; 12:49, 50) and does only what the Father does him to do (5:19, 30; 6:38;), so he does not seek to magnify himself, but the Father.

ye do dishonour me. 50 ... there is one that seeketh and judgeth.--This is their perspective. They are the subject of the first clause, and the implied object of the second. God will deal with them for their impertinency. Compare again 1 Pet 2:23, "committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

51, The Option of Life

So far, they are on the road to judgment. But there is another alternative, one that leads to life.

51 Verily, verily, I say unto you.--This punctuating phrase is particular to John, where it appears 25x. It draws attention to something of particular importance.

If a man keep my saying.--"Keep my saying" is another distinctive Johannine expression. *T8rew ton*

logon appears 14x in the Greek Bible. 13 of these are in John's writings; the 14th is 1 Sam 15:11, when the kingdom is taken from Saul: God says, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not **performed my commandments.**"

The underlying Hebrew of 1 Sam 15:11 (*haqim debarim*) is common in the OT, but the usual translation of the verb is *hist8mi* (or *anist8mi* or *efist8mi*), an idiom that does not appear in the NT. Overwhelmingly, the one who speaks the word that is kept (or not) in the OT is YHWH! Throughout the OT, it is YHWH who requires that people "keep his saying." Thus this statement is reminiscent of the implications of the Lord's finger-writing in 8:6, 8. His sayings are the very word of God.

he shall never see death.--This promise brings us back full circle to v.12, those who follow Jesus have light; those who keep his saying have life. If they continue to view him as diabolical, they will fall under judgment. But if they keep his sayings, if they follow him, if they prove to be his disciples indeed, they will never see death.

This verse also continues one of the threads from the introductory episode. The woman's sin was punishable by death because of her sin (v.5). The Lord convicts her accusers of sin (v.7), and later tells them three times that they thus are under sentence of death (vv. 21, 24). Now he offers them the deliverance that they need: by keeping his saying, they can be delivered from death.

52-56, Jesus' Superiority to Abraham

Now the sequence of the discourse changes, and the Jews take the lead, with Jesus responding.

52-56, Priority to Abraham

52 Now we know that thou hast a devil.--He has pointed out that this is the more serious of their two slurs, the one that incurs God's wrath, and they continue to pursue it. They focus on his claim to be able to deliver from death, and challenge him with two questions.

Abraham is dead ... 53 Art thou greater than our father Abraham.--They continue their preoccupation with their ancestor Abraham. He died. The prophets died. What does Jesus know that they didn't?

Their question recalls the similar challenge of the woman of Samaria in 4:12, "Art thou greater than our father Jacob?"

At least one Jewish sage recognized that Messiah would indeed be greater than Abraham: Tachuma on Isa 52:13 (cited in Gill), "

Behold my servant shall deal prudently", this is the King Messiah; "he shall be exalted" above Abraham, as it is written, [Gen_14:22](#), "and extolled" above Moses, as it is written, [Num_11:12](#), and he shall be higher than the ministering angels, as it is written, [Eze_1:26](#), for he shall be *gadol min abot* "greater than the fathers."

In fact, the whole book of Hebrews is based on the claim that Jesus is greater than all of the OT ordinances. This is the decision to which God calls us: to give Jesus priority over all those who previously held our allegiance and respect (including ourselves).

The Samaritan woman eventually concluded that he was, but these Jews are so hardened that they

cannot, as we see in their concluding question.

whom makest thou thyself?--There are two facets to their second question:

- “Whom”--Who are you? What do you claim to be, that you should be able to grant immunity from death, which Abraham never enjoyed? By itself, this would be a noble question, but they render it superfluous by the other facet:
- “makest thou thyself”--The implication here is that whatever exalted status he claims, is something he is fabricating himself. “Whoever you claim to be, is of course only a put-on show, not real.” (Note that NIV completely misses this nuance with the translation “who do you think you are”, and NET with “who do you claim to be”.)

The Lord responds to these questions in reverse order. First, he responds to the question “Whom makest thou thyself,” and focuses on their suggestion that he is inappropriately making himself to be something important.

54 If I honour myself, my honour is nothing.--If their innuendo that he is fabricating his status is true, they would be right to reject him. Prov 27:2, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”

it is my Father that honoureth me.--He returns to the point he has made previously, that he enjoys the Father's testimony:

- 5:37 the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me
- 6:27 the Son of Man ... him hath God the Father sealed.
- 8:18 the Father that sent me beareth witness of me

This witness began at his baptism; cf. 1:32-34. In the synoptics, the baptismal witness is even stronger, with the *bath qol* declaring him to be the Son of God. In John, the emphasis is more on the Lord's works as evidence of the Father's authority (5:36; 20:31).

of whom ye say, that he is your God.--They have just claimed to be his children (v. 41).

55 Yet ye have not known him.--The evidence being that they do not recognize the one whom he has sent (vv. 42, 47).

but I know him.--The “I” is emphatic, contrasting him with them.

if I should say, I know him not.--Which is what they want him to do, consistent with their accusation that he has a devil.

I shall be a liar like unto you.--If he were to agree with their criticism of them, he would be false to himself. “Like unto you” returns to his diagnosis of their spiritual condition as children of the devil, based on their two characteristics of hatred and deception (v.44).

I know him, and keep his saying.--Just as he calls on them to keep his (Jesus') saying (v.51), he himself keeps the Father's saying. His obedience is evidence of his godly status, as much as their disobedience is evidence that they are of the devil (v.47). Ironically (from their perspective), for Jesus, “keeping his saying” means making the very claims that upset them so.

Note throughout this section how the Lord does not argue with them. He simply presents his claims,

rephrasing them to make them as clear as possible. They are self-consistent, but do not form a syllogism. Our task is not to prove people into the kingdom of God, but to state the truth clearly so that hearts illumined by the Holy Spirit can lay hold of it.

Now he returns to their first question (v.53), “Art thou greater than our father Abraham?” His answer is, “Yes, as Abraham's own conduct shows.”

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day.--“My day” is the day of Christ's incarnation, then current, as in Luke 17:22. On what occasion did he so rejoice?

- Morris cites a range of Jewish interpretations of OT passages to this effect, but without specific citations.
- Edersheim focuses on Gen 15:17, where the Jerusalem Targum suggests that Abraham saw all the events to befall his descendants throughout all time.
- Gill quotes Seder Tifillot to the effect that not only Abraham but also Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Solomon rejoiced at the anticipation that Messiah (“the branch”) would come bringing the joy of the law.
- Some cite Gen 22:13-15, the finding of the ram to replace Isaac. No doubt Abraham did rejoice on this occasion, but it is not stated explicitly in the text.

These are credible, but not explicit in the OT texts. The Lord would be building his argument on Jewish beliefs. “Even your scribes agree that Abraham” Hendriksen makes a strong case that the reference is to the naming of Isaac in Gen 17:17. The Jewish targum on this verse renders “laughed” as “rejoiced.” God had promised Abraham a seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). With the birth of Isaac, that promise takes a step toward fulfillment, and stimulates great joy in Abraham.

Abraham's rejoicing, like Sarah's, was not pure. See notes on Genesis for evidence that there is at least some incredulity in Abraham's response. However, in naming the child “Isaac,” surely he was commemorating not his own unbelief but his joy at seeing the next step toward the promised seed.

he saw it, and was glad.--How does this relate to the first claim? Given the discussion over Abraham's death and the Lord's promise to give life, it seems that this is a claim that Abraham did see the Lord's advent, from his conscious existence in the afterlife (thus Alford, though Westcott is strongly opposed). “You claim that Abraham died, but he consciously awaits the resurrection, and from that vantage point he has seen what he anticipated.” Cf. Luke 16:22-31.

57-59, His identity as the great “I Am”

fifty years old.--The retirement age for Levites (Num 4:3), a round number for an old person. This gives no indication of the Lord's actual age at this point.

hast thou seen Abraham?--They carelessly reverse what he said. He had spoken of Abraham's seeing him; they speak of his seeing Abraham. Here, as in v.52, their slip shows that they are more intent on attacking him than on understanding what he says.

Verily, verily.--Marking this statement as worthy of special attention.

Before Abraham was, I am.--He makes an explicit claim to deity, in two ways.

1. The mismatch in tense is an explicit claim to eternity. The past is all as one present to him. He not only existed before Abraham, he did so in a way that transcends history.
2. "I am," as in vv. 24 and 28, is an explicit claim to a common divine title from Isaiah.

59 Then took they up stones to cast at him.--Their response shows that they understood his claim in this way.

Jesus hid himself.--Thee form is actually passive, and the point may be that the Father concealed him, making him indistinguishable from other people in the crowd. Compare Luke 24:16, of the two on the road to Emmaus: "their eyes were holden that they should not know him." His hour is not yet come, and they cannot lay hands on him, even though he goes "through the midst of them."

and went out of the temple.--This is a poignant gesture, if we keep in mind the history of the Babylonian captivity.

- 1 The priests had allowed the temple to be polluted with idolatry:
 - 1.1 Manasseh's graven image (2 Chr 33:7) at the north gate, Ezek 8:3
 - 1.2 Ezek 8:9-11, worship of creeping things
 - 1.3 Ezek 8:14, weeping for Tammuz
 - 1.4 Ezek 8:16, worshipping the sun
- 2 The glory of God deserted the temple as a result (Ezek 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).
- 3 Haggai (2:1-9) promised those who returned under Zerubbabel that the glory would return, and the fulfillment is the Lord Jesus' presence in the temple; cf. Mal 3:1.

Once again, as in Ezekiel's day, the religious leaders have gone astray. They do not recognize God's own Son. When the Lord leaves, it is the departure of the only presence of God that is recorded in the second temple.

This is not his last visit there (ch. 10), but the parallel with Ezekiel should give them pause. They are living on borrowed time.

Revisiting the Adultery Pericope

When we began this chapter, we noted that the adultery pericope, though rejected by most modern scholars, is integral to the argument. By way of summarizing the chapter, let's review how it sets up the main themes that we have studied.

Movement.--We noted the elaborate chiasm in ch. 7. This chiasm begins with the Lord entering the temple, and ends with his departure from it—only if we include 7:53-8:11. Similarly, with the pericope, his return to the temple in v. 2 balances his departure in 59.

Stoning.--8:5 is John's first reference to stoning; by the end of the chapter (59) they seek to stone Jesus, and this is a continuing theme through the next few chapters (10:31, 32, 33; 11:8). Their objective of accusing him (v.6) suggests that they would like to get him in trouble with the authorities for instigating a stoning. By the end of the chapter they are so full of wrath that they assume the same risk. Their trap has turned upon themselves.

John 8

Time.--The time note “early in the morning” (2), as the sun was rising, is appropriate to his proclamation of himself as the light of the world (12)

Claim to deity.--In writing with the finger (8:6), he is claiming to be the divine lawgiver, as he is in v.51 by appropriating the OT phrase “keep my saying,” which overwhelmingly refers to God's words.

Accusation.--His emphasis on the sin of the Jewish leaders, begun with his charge in 8:7, continues in 21, 44 and often.

Death penalty.--The Jews say that the woman should die because of her sin (8:5). The Lord turns their standard back on their own heads with his charge, “ye shall die in your sins,” 21.

In its present location, the pericope fits perfectly with the flow of the story. It prepares the reader for the body of ch. 8, just as the Lord's interview with his brothers prepared us for ch. 7, and as the healing of the blind man in ch. 9 prepares us for ch. 10. We can be comfortable retaining it in its traditional place at the head of ch. 8.

Notes

Untangling the structure of 12-56 is guided by some basic principles:

- “said” vs. “answered”--someone who “says” is trying to take the conversation in a new direction, while “answering” indicates a dependency on what goes before.
- Whether the interlocutors are re-identified by name.