

The Gospel of John (60); Jesus Healed a Man born Blind (2)

Introduction:

The last time we were together in this fourth Gospel we considered the miracle that Jesus performed when he gave sight to a man who had been born blind. This is the sixth sign of John's Gospel in which the glory of God in Jesus Christ is wonderfully displayed and proclaimed. This man had been blind not due to sin that he had committed, or sin that his parents had committed. The reason that He had been born blind was ultimately due to God's purpose to glorify Himself through His Son when He gave sight to this man. This is what our Lord stated when His disciples had inquired of Him the reason that this man being born blind. We read in verse 3, "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'"

The miracle that Jesus performed was one of the most amazing of His ministry. A man born blind was enabled by Him to see. **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) wrote of this event:

The disciples wanted to know how the man came to be blind, but the Master meant to deliver the man from his blindness. We are very apt to be entering into speculative theories about the origin of sin or the cause of certain strange providences; but Christ is ever for seeking out, not the cause, but the remedy; not the reason of the disease, but the way by which the disease can be cured. The blind man is brought to him. Christ asks him no questions; but, spitting upon the dust, he stoops down, and works the dust into mortar, and when he has done this, taking it up in his hands, he applies it to what Bishop Hall calls the eye-holes of the man (for there were no eyes there), and plasters them up, so, that the spectators look on, and see a man with clay upon his eyes. "Go," said Christ "to, the pool of Siloam, and wash." Some kind friends led the man, who, was only too glad to go. Unlike Naaman, who made an objection to wash in Jordan, and be clean, the blind man was glad enough to avail himself of the divine remedy. He went, he washed the clay from his eyes, and he received his sight, — a blessing he had never known before. With what rapture he gazed upon the trees! With what delight he lifted up his face to the blue sky! With what pleasure he beheld the costly, stately fabric of the temple; and methinks, afterwards, with what interest and pleasure he would look into the face of Jesus, — the man who had given him his sight.¹

The miracle caused quite a stir throughout Jerusalem. It would seem that most knew of this man as a beggar, whom they saw regularly near the environs of the temple. The miracle was so startling that even those who knew him quite well were not quite sure of his identity after his healing. We read of them in verses 8ff:

⁸Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?"

⁹Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him."
He said, "I am he."

The man himself did not have a great deal of knowledge about the one who had been so gracious to him, enabling him to see for the first time in his life. When asked how it happened, he gave the briefest of details. He said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." He knew Jesus by name, but that is about all he knew. But he knew that this man had done something for him that he had never imagined could be

¹ Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 51 (Pilgrim Publications, 1969), p. 469.

done. There was never a story, a record, that it had ever been done. But he had received this untold blessing from this man--Jesus.

We next read of the man being drawn before the Jewish leadership to inquire of the details of this miracle that had surprised and stirred the city. This is an extended portion of this passage. It might be described as *An Investigation of the Miracle*. We will read **John 9:13** through **34**.

¹³They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

¹⁶Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."

Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

¹⁷They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. ¹⁹And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

²⁰His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."

²⁵He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

²⁶Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

²⁷He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?"

²⁸Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from."

³⁰The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! ³¹Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. ³²Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. ³³If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

³⁴They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.

I. The Inquiry of the Pharisees (9:13-16a)

John recorded in his Gospel that some brought this man, to whom Jesus had given sight, to the Pharisees. John does not say who it was that brought him or why they brought him to the Pharisees. We simply read in **verse 13**, "*They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees.*" But from the manner in which the Pharisees have been described and portrayed in this Gospel, this man probably anticipated a difficult encounter. Perhaps those who brought the man did not have hostile intentions, but thought that they had a responsibility to bring this man before their "respected" spiritual leaders to obtain their assessment and perhaps gain their endorsement of the one who had healed this man.

Spiritual leaders are sometimes presented with situations that call upon them to assess and pronounce a decision or take action on a spiritual matter. They have a great responsibility before the Lord to judge

matters rightly. And sometimes the best course is to forestall judgment because insufficient information has been given or insufficient time has transpired to make a wise deliberation. But the responsibility of spiritual leaders is very important. And they are very accountable to the Lord. And sadly, they are not always right in the manner that they address spiritual matters. I know of two different churches of which their leaders made decisions and took actions recently that I thought were unbiblical. Both these sets of leaders I believe to be sincere and were certainly convinced that their actions were right before the Lord, but sadly they were not. But they were terrible wrong. They may have been right in some details, but their responses were not in accordance with the Word of God. Their actions brought unwarranted hurt and pain, and will probably result in ongoing difficulties that could have been avoided had they responded in a true biblical manner. I suspect these Pharisees were quite convinced that they conducted this interview and reacted and responded in a way that pleased God. Can you imagine what these Jewish leaders are going to think and feel when they are summoned before King Jesus on the Day of Judgment and they are called to give an account of their actions on this occasion? May the Lord have mercy on us and may He enable us to make right, biblical responses and take biblical actions when presented with difficult situations.

Now the apostle John related this account suggesting at the outset of this interview how it would proceed. We read in **verse 14**, *“Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.”* The reader of the Gospel might already suspect from this statement of the Evangelist that these Pharisees are going to falsely charge Jesus with transgressing the day by performing this “work” of making clay and healing this man by this means.

Sabbath observance was one of the primary causes of conflict between the Lord Jesus and the established religious leadership. The Jews had long before adopted as the authoritative interpretation of Holy Scripture the tradition of the elders. After a remnant of Jews had returned from their Babylonian Exile in the latter 6th and early 5th centuries B.C., there developed what came to be known as “The Great Synagogue.” Upon the Jews initial return to their land, God had raised up three writing prophets who brought the Word of God to the post-exilic community. These prophets were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. According to Jewish tradition, at the end of the ministry of these three prophets, they passed on the Scriptures and their teaching about the Scriptures to a collection of prominent Jewish rabbis (teachers). The names of these rabbis are unknown, however, these highly regarded rabbis became collectively known as The Great Synagogue. The Great Synagogue in turn passed on their teaching, largely oral tradition, to various rabbis whose names are notably known and revered throughout Jewish history. They put into writing much of the oral tradition. This oral tradition, once written down and passed from generation to generation, had become the accepted and authoritative interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Jews of the first century. In fact, the Tradition of the elders became viewed as authoritative as the written Hebrew Scriptures. The Tradition was viewed as a “fence” about the law. It set forth stipulations and practices that if a person followed its precepts, he could be “assured” that he was not breaking God’s law. As such, the Tradition of the elders required far more than what the law required. In fact, the Tradition came to be viewed as more important and authoritative than the Scriptures themselves. There is a passage in the Talmud that reads, “To be against the words of the scribes is more punishable than to be against the word of the Bible.”²

The Tradition of the Jews had very many detailed regulations governing Sabbath day observance. And being accused of breaking their Sabbath day laws was no trifle charge, for the penalty of such an infraction was public flogging or execution. The Pharisees may not object to the activity itself, only that it was done on Saturday, the Sabbath day, a day of rest on which no work whatsoever was to be performed. Here we see the excessive legalism of this religious group being displayed. The Pharisees were extreme in this regard. They would not live by principle that the Sabbath was a day in which work generally was set aside for the purpose of rest. They defined and stipulated precisely what constituted work and impose their rules and penalty for infractions on the people of God. Over the course of years, the legalistic element in Judaism established **39 categories** of what they regarded as work. Each category had **6 minor categories**, each minor category had a list of specific laws prohibiting specific activities, **234 violations** in all.

² Quoted from the Talmud by A. T. Robertson, **The Pharisees and Jesus**, p. 130, according to William Hendriksen, **Matthew**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1973), p. 614.

When John wrote in verse 14, “Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes”, it was suggested that His action would be regarded as work which violated the law of God respecting Sabbath day observance. This was no doubt their assessment when we read **verse 15**: “*Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.’*” The conclusion was immediate and certain, at least by some. We read in **verse 16**, “*Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’*”

We had considered earlier our Lord Jesus declaring that this action He took to give sight to this man born blind was actually a work of God. After our Lord had declared the reason for this man being born blind, He implied that it was the work of His Father that He was to bestow sight to this man. We read in verses 3 and 4, “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. *I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.*’” What these Pharisees were actually stating in their accusation was that God Himself had violated the Sabbath day by Jesus doing His work of healing this man.

In like manner, *the Pharisees* brought against Christ a plausible maxim, *That he who does not keep Sabbath is not from God*; but they unjustly and falsely asserted that the work of God is a violation of the Sabbath.³

Although some make the laws of Scripture to appear more lenient than what God intended (antinomianism), others make God’s laws more restrictive, more binding upon the consciences of Christians than they should (legalism). We should be careful not to make more rigid God’s laws than what is prescribed in Scripture. **Matthew Henry** wrote of this:

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 stricter 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.⁴

But not all of the Pharisees concurred with this assessment that Jesus had violated the Sabbath. We next read that there was...

II. Division among the Pharisees (9:16b)

We read in **verse 16b**, “*Others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.*” Now John does not specify who these other Pharisees were, but it is not out of possibility, perhaps even probability, that Nicodemus was among them. He had declared earlier to Jesus in John 3:2, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” He seemed there to include others along with him who were convinced that Jesus was from God. And here in John 9:16b those who differed from the conclusion of some of the Pharisees posed the question, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” They were convinced that Jesus was a man from God due to the “signs” that He had displayed before them.

³ John Calvin, **Calvin’s Commentaries**, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 376.

⁴ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 4 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 1018.

There was division. Now often the Lord Jesus is presented as though He were the Great Unifier of people—He is the bringer of peace. They appeal to Jesus in order to lead everybody to get along with one another. But actually the Lord Jesus often brought division between people. He is the Great Divider. We might again cite **Matthew Henry**, who saw this event as an emblem of the manner in which the Lord defeats His enemies:

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.⁵

All division is not necessarily a bad thing. There are many truths of our Christian faith that should divide us from those who refuse to embrace them.

III. The witness of the beggar himself (9:17)

We read in **verse 17**, “*They said to the blind man again, ‘What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’*” Here we see one benefit of there having been a division of these men. It resulted in them having to enquire more clearly and fully the facts of the incident. And so, “They said to the blind man *again*.”

It is not clear who and why they queried this man again. Were they attempting to get this man to discredit Jesus who had healed him? Or, was it those who were sympathetic toward Jesus who asked this question in order to pull a more firm confession from this man about the identity of Jesus? It is not quite clear which was the case.

From the answer of this man we see that he knew little of the identity and nature of the one who had enabled him to see. But he knew that He must be of God. The man was certain He was a prophet. It is in a sense a statement of faith on the part of this man. He did not know much, but he was willing to speak up in this hostile group a word in defense of his benefactor.

This expression was the beginning of faith in the healed man. It was a declaration of his own belief that the Person who had wrought such a great cure must be a Person specially raised by God to do great works, like Elijah or Elisha.⁶

But some might think that this was not a very high estimation of Jesus by this man. But on the contrary, it may have been the highest position that this man could have rendered to Jesus. But let us also consider the growth of understanding of this man as to the identity of Jesus and his response to him as the passage unfolded. At the same time consider the opposite direction of those who opposed Jesus and sought to discredit Him and the miracle He performed. **Leon Morris** stated the matter well:

The man is definite. “He is a prophet.” If this seems to us inadequate we must remember that the man had no way of knowing that Jesus was more. His contact with the Lord had been very brief. And for him “prophet” was probably the highest place he could assign to a man of God. His answer puts Jesus in the highest place he knew. It is interesting to notice his progressive apprehension of the significance of Jesus. He passes from thinking of Him as a man (v. 11) to seeing Him as a prophet (here). Then he advances to the thought of one to whom allegiance may fitly be given (vs. 27f), then to one “from God” (v. 33), and finally he comes to believe in the Son of Man to whom worship should be given (vs. 35-38). By contrast the Pharisees, starting with the view that Jesus is not from God (v. 16), question the miracle

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 174.

(v. 18), speak of Jesus as a sinner (v. 24), are shown to be ignorant (v. 29), and finally are pronounced to be blind and sinners (v. 41).⁷

IV. The appeal of the Pharisees to the beggar's parents (9:18-23)

The Pharisees refused to believe that this man had been born blind, that Jesus had bestowed sight to him. Beginning with verse 18 we read of the interaction of the Pharisees and the man's parents.

¹⁸But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. ¹⁹And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

²⁰His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

The Jews would have evidence that this man had not been the recipient of a miracle performed by Jesus. They would prefer to prove that this man had not been given sight than have to acknowledge that a great miracle had been performed by Jesus. And so, they called his parents to testify regarding their son.

We read that these parents forfeited an opportunity that has been afforded to few people in history. They could have born witness to the glory of God in Jesus Christ for having performed this miracle on behalf of their son. But the fear of man paralyzed them. They would not claim any knowledge but that which was patently obvious. "Yes, the man was their son and yes, he had been born blind." John tells us that his parents said these things because they feared the Jews (v. 23).

The leaders of the Jews had already attempted to squelch any voice that would promote the name and cause of Jesus. We read in **verse 22**, "*for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.*"

The word, "already", suggests an interesting issue. John the apostle wrote this Gospel in the 90's AD, some 60 years after the events had taken place. After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the non-Christian Jews held a great council called the Council of Jamnia in AD 90. At this council the Sanhedrin of the Jews changed the liturgy that was observed by all synagogues everywhere so as to identify and exclude Christian Jews from their gatherings. Here is a description of that action:

The Twelfth Benediction, re-written by Samuel the Small for the Sanhedrin reconstituted after the devastating fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. All pious Jews would recite the liturgical Eighteen Benedictions (*cf.* Schuerer, 2. 459-463) three times a day. The Twelfth, re-written (it is thought) to exclude Christian Jews from the synagogue by including in the liturgy a snippet that no Christian could utter, ran something like the following: 'For the renegades let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarenes [*i.e.* Christians] and the *minim* ['heretics'] perish as in a moment and be rooted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.' This is often ironically called 'the benediction of the heretics' (*birkat ha-minim*).⁸

When John was writing his Gospel, when he came to relate this account of the man brought before the Pharisees, he was writing with this practice of the Jews putting Christians out of their synagogues. When he was telling of the fear of the man's parents, he indicated that "the Jews had agreed *already* that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue." Way back then, even during our

⁷ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 486.

⁸ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 369f.

Lord's earthly ministry, if any Jewish person professed support for Jesus, the Jews would have him excluded from the synagogue.

This action of the Jews would be the equivalent of excommunication from the local church, the result of the disciplinary process of a church member who is no longer living or believing as a Christian, who has been confronted but has refused to humble himself and repent of his sin. The church is commanded to remove him from church membership. The Jews did so to any Jewish man or woman that claimed to be a supporter or believer in Jesus.

However, we should not think that this earlier action of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem was a widespread policy among all synagogues in the Roman world. We read in the book of Acts that the early Jewish Christians were commonly associated and involved in Jewish synagogues. But here in Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders had taken this strong stand to threaten people like the parents of this man, so that they would not publically endorse Jesus as one to be believed and followed. And we will read later in John's Gospel something rather interesting. John 12:41 and 42 record these words, "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

The parents brought an end to their interrogation, when they said in **verse 24**, "*He is of age; ask him.*" This would mean that the young man to whom Jesus gave sight was at least 13 years old. That was regarded as the age when one could give credible testimony before others.

V. Another appeal to the blind beggar (9:24-27)

We read that the Jewish authorities once again interrogated the man regarding the miracle that had occurred to him. We read in **verse 24**, "*So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.'*" It would seem that the Jewish leaders had to concede that a miracle had taken place. The parents had testified that this was their son and that he had been born blind. But now everyone, including them, knew that he could see. What were they to do? The Jews would do all they could do to take away any credit, any glory, from being given to Jesus. They urged that the man give glory to God alone for having given him sight. They said to him, "We know this man is a sinner." Or, "We know this man could not have been the cause of you seeing, for He is a sinner and sinners cannot enable blind people to see, especially one who was born blind. Give glory to God for having done this, but not Him."

There is a similar kind of "pressure" that is exerted today in our culture. Although most people do not like it when someone gives glory to "God" for something remarkable that takes place, there is a common revulsion when glory is given directly to Jesus Christ. People do not like that. And you intuitively know this is the case. It seems that professing Christians pull back their praise in a measure by speaking in more general terms, speaking of "God", for they know that declaring the name, "Jesus", accentuates their speech and claim. But let us readily acknowledge that God (both Father and the Holy Spirit) has the utmost desire and delight in the exaltation of the name of Jesus. And Jesus Himself declared,

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, ²³that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."
(John 5:22f)

When God does something gracious on your behalf, when He displays some mercy, some act of grace, give glory to Jesus Christ. This will delight His Father. Yes, it will anger some, but let it be so.

Now this man refused to go where these Jewish leaders would take him. He boldly said to them in **verse 25**, "*He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.'*"

All who have felt Christ's spiritual power will adopt this language. Whatever they know not, this they know, that, whereas they were blind, now they see.⁹

It is as though he said to them, "He did it, and that I cannot and will not deny. It matters not what you or I say that He is, I was blind until the time He came to me, spit in the dirt and anointed my eyes with the mud, and commanded me to go and wash, and now I see." This man did not know much about Jesus, but he knew that He must be a prophet; He must be of God."

The man has a sturdy independence as his answer shows. He does not go into the theoretical question of whether or not Jesus was a sinner or not. He sticks to the facts of which he has certain knowledge, and thus produces an answer which is a classic. No fine-spun web of airy theory can budge a man who is able to say with conviction "one thing I know". The man had sight. No mere words could alter that.¹⁰

People are emboldened when they perceive that they are the recipients of the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ. See the boldness of this formerly blind man, who had begged for the smallest of mercies from those who pass by, but who has now received great mercy and great grace from Jesus Christ! This is the kind of witness that the world, even those of the world who are belligerent toward the Lord, cannot repress or refute. Consider the newly converted Paul to Christ. He, too, was blind, for a few days. But after the Lord had sent Ananias to restore his sight we read of him boldly proclaiming Christ.

¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized... ²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 9:18, 20-22)

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) wrote of this former blind man testifying before these Pharisees in Jerusalem:

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 (lack) 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.

Matthew Henry then went on to describe this man's witness:

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.*"

⁹ B. Thomas, **The Pulpit Commentary**, vol. 17, The Gospel of John, edited by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (William B. Eerdmans, 1950), vol. 2, p. 22.

¹⁰ Morris, **John**, p. 491.

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 (absence) 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 (1 John 1:1; Acts 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” (Eph. 5:8).

Now it would seem these Pharisees were becoming exasperated in that they were getting nowhere with this man. He was insisting on giving glory to Jesus for what had happened to him. But they would have none of that, so we read of one more attempt to reproach him and attempt to find some flaw or weakness in his claim. **Verse 26** reads, “*Then they said to him again, ‘What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?’*”

But this man who has become increasingly bold and forthright in his dealings with these religious ones answered them, and in a way that confronted them with their obstinacy. In verse 27 this bold man became even more direct with his inquisitors: “*He answered them, ‘I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?’*” By this rather ironic challenge of the man, he seems to betray the fact that he himself has already become one of Jesus’ disciples. This is what they had been essentially accusing him of being, but here he seems to own the charge.

I appreciate what **John Calvin** wrote of this. He spoke of how we should not back down from those who would shame us or threaten us when we can testify of Jesus Christ before them.

When we see wicked men so delighted in performing their own base actions, we ought to be ashamed of our slothfulness, in acting with such coolness about the affairs of Christ. Though they search on all sides to obtain grounds of slander, the Lord defeats their attempts, in a remarkable manner, by the unshaken firmness of the blind man; for not only does he persist in his opinion, but he freely and severely reproaches them, that after having abundantly ascertained and known the truth, they endeavor to bury it by their continual inquiries. He charges them also with wicked hatred of Christ, when he says, *Do you also wish to become his disciples?* For he means that, though they were a hundred times convinced, they are so strongly prejudiced by wicked and hostile dispositions, that they will never yield. It is an astonishing display of freedom, when a man of mean (simple) and low condition, and especially liable to be reproached on account of his poverty, fearlessly provokes the rage of all the priests against himself. If that which was nothing more than a small preparation for faith gave him so much boldness, when he came to the struggle, what excuse can be pleaded by great preachers of the Gospel, who, though they are beyond the reach of darts, are silent as soon as danger is threatened?¹¹

VI. The reactions and responses of the Pharisees and the man (9:28-34)

²⁸Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”

³⁰The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! ³¹Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. ³²Since the world began it has been unheard of that

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 383f.

anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. ³³If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

³⁴They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out.

Here, we may consider that the man who was formerly blind could now see quite clearly as to the legitimacy and divine blessing of Jesus who had given him sight. But at the same time we see the abject spiritual blindness of these Jewish leaders, whose spiritual darkness is both incapable and unwilling to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ. He could see, but they were blind.

Consider the claim of these men. “We are Moses’ disciples.” God gave His law through Moses, and that law was a ministry of death to all who understood it rightly and observed it faithfully (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:7). The law condemned men for it revealed and condemned sin in them. The law was intended by God to prepare His people for the coming of Jesus Christ, who alone could save them from the condemnation that the law brought upon them. Moses, therefore, foretold of Christ. But these men, presumed that they were righteous before God by the keeping of the law of Moses. They were self-righteous, self-deceived, and self-condemned. And they failed to know Him whom they called “this fellow”, dismissing Him from any consideration of their need and His importance.

Naturally they do not appreciate the man’s irony; it is too evident that he has seen through their plan to trip him up. They therefore have recourse to abuse. Who would be a disciple of someone whose origin was unknown and whose authority was disallowed by those in position to judge such matters? An ignoramus like the man who stood before them might know no better than to take such a person seriously; they were better informed. Moses was their teacher; they were his disciples. The tradition of the oral law transmitted in the rabbinical schools was held to stem from Moses, who (they believed) had received it on Sinai together with the written law. No one could doubt that God spoke to Moses; of him God Himself had said, ‘With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech’ (Numb. 12:8). Moses was the pre-eminent prophet of the Lord; the claim to be disciples of his was a claim worth making. The disciples of this nobody from Nazareth were worthy of Him whom they chose as their teacher. In all this, indeed, the Evangelist (John) practices his own brand of irony; he and his readers know of Jesus’ true origin; they know, moreover, that while ‘the law was given through Moses, the full revelation of God came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).¹²

The man responded to them with clarity and confidence. Moreover, he reasoned with them in a manner that they could not justly refute him:

³⁰The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! ³¹Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. ³²Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. ³³If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

This simple, young man, who had lived an obscure and insignificant life, came forward and bested the religious leaders of his people. He had more spiritual sense than all who had confronted and challenged him. In the end all they could do was to excommunicate him. And that is how John’s words in verse 34 should be understood. “They answered and said to him, ‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’ **And they cast him out.**” How dare he challenge them and question their authority and legitimacy before God!

This man had stood for truth as he had come to understand it and experience it firsthand. The result is that he lost all that anyone in his community would have held most dear— to be in God’s favor, to be a member of the people of God. Can we imagine what he must have thought or how he felt as he left their presence? Bewilderment, no doubt. Did he question the purpose and will of God in all that had transpired?

¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 217f.

I think so. But he could see! And it was Jesus who gave him his sight! And next week, Lord willing, we will consider our Lord seeking him out and revealing Himself fully to him as His Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

In closing, let us consider two matters. First, let us think upon the great tragedy of these Jewish men, these Pharisees, who were so sure of themselves and so sure that this man had nothing to tell them or teach them. The Lord often will bring us lessons through ones we might have at first dismissed quite readily. Here is a good closing word from **John Calvin**. He wrote of the terrible disregard and attitude of dismissiveness that these religious men had toward this rather simple and humble man:

This undeserved censure ought to instruct us to be exceedingly cautious, not always to estimate the sins of any person by the chastisements of God; for, as we have already seen, God has various ends to accomplish, by inflicting calamities on men. But not only do those hypocrites insult the wretched man; they likewise reject disdainfully his warnings, though they are holy and good; as indeed it very frequently happens that one cannot endure to be taught by him whom he despises. Now, since we ought always to hear God, by whomsoever he may talk to us, let us learn not to despise any man, that God may find us always mild and submissive, even though he employ a person altogether mean (simple, plain) and despicable to instruct us. For there is not a more dangerous plague than when pride stops our ears, so that we do not deign to hear those who warn us for our profit; and it frequently happens that God purposely selects vile and worthless persons to instruct and warn us, in order to subdue our pride.¹³

And lastly, let us see how like this man born blind we all were before the Lord Jesus came and gave us the ability to see ourselves and Him. Here, again, is **Charles Spurgeon**:

Man is blind. Father Adam put out our eyes. We cannot see spiritual things. We have not the spiritual optic; that has gone, — gone for ever. We are born without it, — born blind. Christ comes into this world, and His gospel is despicable in men's esteem even as spittle, — the thought of it disgusts most men. Gentility turns on its heel, and saith it will have nothing to do with it, and pomp and glory all say that it is a contemptible and base thing. Christ puts the gospel on the blind eye, — a gospel which, like clay, seems as if it would make men more blind than before, but it is through "the foolishness of preaching" that Christ saves them that believe. The Holy Spirit is like Siloam's pool. We go to Him, or rather He comes to us, the convictions of sin produced by the gospel are washed away by the cleansing influences of the Divine Comforter; and, behold, we, who were once so blind that we could see no beauty in divine things, and no excellence in the crown jewels of God, begin to see things in a clear and heavenly light, and rejoice exceedingly before the Lord.¹⁴

Do you *see* the beauty and wonder of the Lord Jesus who has enabled us to see these glorious truths, these realities of the gospel whereby we are saved? May this be so for every one of us. Let us pray to this end.

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,
¹²and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,
¹³so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father,
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess. 3:11-13)

¹³ John Calvin, **Calvin's Commentaries**, Vol. XVII (Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 386f.

¹⁴ Charles Spurgeon, **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit**, vol. 51 (Pilgrim Publications, 1969), p. 470.