

## Notes on John 8

© Copyright David E. Pratte, August 25, 2007, [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)

### Jesus as the Source of Light and Truth – John 8

#### The Woman Taken in Adultery – 8:1-11

This section of John is missing from some of the oldest Bible manuscripts. For that reason, some modern Bibles note that some students doubt that it belongs in the book. However, there is little doubt that the event is historically accurate – i.e., it really did happen. The only question is whether or not John included it in his account or whether someone else added it later. In any case, the teaching of the passage is in complete harmony with Jesus' teaching and with other Scripture. We will treat it as truth. For a longer discussion of the specific evidence regarding the passage, see King's comments.

Verses 1,2

1. What problem did the scribes and Pharisees present to Jesus in vv 1-5?

#### *Jesus teaches in the temple.*

The people had gone home (7:53), but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem (see MAP). This is where He often went in the evenings and then returned in the day. It was here He went to pray on the night before His crucifixion.

Early the next morning He returned to the temple and taught the people. This was also customary for Him. It was an obvious purpose for the temple and an obvious place to do teaching, since many people came there for religious purposes. It seems that the feast had already ended, so many people who had come for the feast would have by this time gone home. However, many no doubt remained some time afterward, and of course many people lived in Jerusalem. It is likely (King says it was traditional) that many other religious teachers would also come to the temple grounds to teach, so people who wanted to hear religious discussions would go there expecting to learn from those who taught. However, it also made an obvious place for Jesus' enemies to find Him, as they did here.

Verses 3-5

2. What did Moses' law say should be done in such a case (give **b/c/v**)?

#### *The Pharisees bring a woman caught in the act of adultery.*

The scribes and Pharisees, as they often did, found a way to try to test or trap Jesus (v6). They brought a woman to Jesus in the midst of the multitude and said she had been caught in the very act of adultery. They pointed out that, according to the Law of Moses she was to be stoned to death. They asked Him what He said about it.

The teaching of the law is found in Lev. 20:10; Deut 22:22-24. Note that these passages teach both the adulterer and the adulteress should be put to death. If the woman was taken in the very act, then the man should have been caught too. Where was he? If the Jews were really so concerned about following Moses' law as they pretended to be, they would have brought the man too. What they really wanted to do was to trap Jesus. As usual, they are being hypocrites.

Verse 6

3. Special Assignment: Explain why this question would be challenging or difficult for Jesus.

#### *They seek an occasion to accuse Jesus.*

This whole event was an attempt to trap Jesus and have something to accuse Him of. The fact that they had ulterior motives should be obvious in several ways. First, they had brought only the woman. But the law required both the adulterer and the adulteress to be stoned. Why

had they not brought the man? Second, why bring her to Jesus for judgment? He held no earthly position whatever that gave Him the authority to judge the case. As shown in the notes below, such cases were to be judged by the priests or others in positions of such responsibility. Third, they had already stated what the law said: it said to stone her. If they knew what the law said, why ask Him about it? Why not just do what they acknowledged was taught in the law? The whole case smelled from the beginning of a contrived effort to trap Jesus.

Wherein was the trap? Probably their idea related to their belief that He came to be an earthly king. If so, He should judge such matters as this. If He judged to kill her, they could accuse Him to the Romans of having usurped their authority, since no one could be put to death without their authority (18:31). If he said not to kill her, then they could accuse Him of breaking Moses' law (an accusation they had already raised against Him regarding the Sabbath).

Perhaps too it was a sort of fishing expedition in which they hoped to find something to use against Him, but were not sure what they would find. In any case, they themselves had nothing to lose (they thought) and might get something to use against Him.

Jesus stooped and wrote on the ground with His finger as if He had not heard them. Why do this? He was in no hurry to judge the matter. It surely had the effect of building suspense. At the least, this made it clear that He had no desire to usurp Roman rule and judge such matters. It was the Jews who were forcing the issue and compelling Him to make a decision. Sometimes it is important to make clear to the bystanders who the aggressors are in a situation. Let them see that you do not seek an occasion of argument, but the issue is being forced by others.

Verses 7,8

4. What answer did Jesus give (v7)?

5. What Old Testament passages did Jesus' answer harmonize with? Explain.

### ***Jesus calls on those who are without sin to cast the first stone.***

As they continued to press Him for an answer, He said that whoever among them was sinless should be the first to throw a stone at her. Then he stooped and wrote again. This gave them time to consider the matter while not having to face Him as they thought about it.

This turned the tables on them in more than one way. First, it gave them the duty to kill her, if it was to be done. He was not the one who would violate Roman law by killing her, and in fact He would not even be her judge. They would have to judge both her and themselves, and they would have to execute her if it was to be done. In that case, they, not He, would be answerable to the Romans for having usurped their authority.

But even more important, this approach was in harmony with the Law of Moses, which they claimed to be following. The law expressly stated that, in a capital crime, the witnesses must be the first ones to initiate the execution of the guilty (Deut. 17:6,7; cf. Deut. 13:9). This law required the witnesses to demonstrate their conviction that their testimony was true to the point that they would actually begin the execution of the criminal. In reminding them of this principle, Jesus avoided their trap while at the same upholding the law. He appealed to the very source of authority they had cited: the Old Testament law. He then called upon them to demonstrate their commitment to the law and to the guilt of the woman by being the ones to cast the stones.

Further, He appealed to their own consciences. In the presence of all the people, He was forcing them to claim, if they stoned her, that they themselves were innocent of guilt. If they were guilty of sins themselves, however, what right did they have to condemn her to death? They had come to Him with hypocritical intentions, not to uphold the law, but to trap Him. His approach called attention to their own wickedness and hypocritical motives in the very act of bringing the woman to Jesus.

Note that this does not say, as some claim, that we should never criticize the sins of others, and if we do we are hypocrites claiming we ourselves never sin. See notes on 7:7,24. Jesus' disci-

ples often pointed out people's errors. However, condemning someone to death is not the same as just telling them they have sinned.

Verses 9-11

6. How did the woman's accusers respond?

7. What conclusion did Jesus reach (vv 9-11)? Did he deny or acknowledge the woman's guilt?

8. What did the Old Testament say about the number of witnesses needed to condemn a person to death? Give **b/c/v**.

9. Case Study: Many people use this example to argue that we should not rebuke people for sin, including even serious moral sins like adultery. How should we respond? Explain.

### *The accusers leave the woman uncondemned.*

The consciences of these men would not allow them to be the first to throw a stone at her. They left, from the oldest to the last, leaving the woman standing alone with Jesus in the middle of the multitude. Jesus asked whether she had been condemned by any of those men who had accused her. When she confirmed that none had, He said He did not condemn her either, but she should go and sin no more.

Did Jesus here violate the law that said she should be stoned? Did He teach us that we should not condemn sin, and that God is too loving to punish people for sin? Many people use this event to defend such views, but clearly none of these views are acceptable. Jesus never committed any sins at all, not here or elsewhere. He never broke the law and never told others to do so (see notes on 5:10-18). He often rebuked sin and taught that God will unquestionably punish people for sin (see notes on 7:7,24). What then did He mean?

(1) "Condemn" in v11 is used as in v10 — to pass a death sentence and determine to stone her to death. Her accusers had not been willing to do that (v10), and neither would Jesus condemn her to be stoned (v11). He was not denying her guilt, nor was He unwilling to rebuke her for sin — in fact, He immediately proceeded to affirm and rebuke her guilt. He condemned her of sin, but did not condemn her to **death**. We are not doing that to anyone!

(2) Nevertheless, that He knew she had sinned and needed to repent is clear in that He told her to "sin no more." Time and again people cite the case of this woman as evidence that Christians today should not rebuke people for sin. They argue that, if we do, we are claiming we ourselves have committed no sins. Such reasoning shows complete ignorance of this case and of the Bible teaching about rebuking sin. If we should not rebuke people for sin, why did Jesus tell the woman to sin no more? By this statement, He plainly acknowledged that she had sinned and plainly called upon her to repent. This is all we say to anyone, when we tell them to repent. We are telling them they have sinned and need to stop it.

This passage does not teach us we are wrong to rebuke sin, but shows us by the example of Jesus Himself that we ought to tell people to stop sinning! Those who think Jesus did not believe in rebuking people for sin ought to study carefully the context of v44 in this very chapter.

(3) The law required a person to be put to death only if there were two or more witnesses to condemn them. They could not be condemned when there were no witnesses, nor even if there was just one witness (see Deut. 19:15; 17:6; cf. John 8:16; Matt. 18:15-17; etc.). In this case the witnesses had left, having refused to fulfill their duty under the law to be the first to cast stones at her. This left Jesus with no choice, even under the law. He could not condemn her to death, since there were no witnesses. He could rebuke her for sin, which He did. But had He condemned her to death, He Himself would have stood in violation of the law!

(4) Jesus was not the one to judge this matter in any case. He had no authority under Roman law to condemn anyone to death. And under the Law of Moses, questions about judgment were to be taken to the priests or other people in places of authority (see Deut. 19:15ff). Jesus

was in no such position (though the people thought He came for that purpose). He had not come to be judge, but to be a teacher and a savior (see John 3:17; 8:15; 12:47; Luke 12:14; 19:10). He will some day return to be judge, but that was not the purpose of His first coming. He had no authority to serve as an earthly judge in this case.

It is also true that Jesus had power on earth to directly forgive sins. He had exercised this power several times. It is possible that He did so in this case. However, personally, I doubt that is the point here. The point is that the witnesses did not condemn her to death, so neither did Jesus. As a prophet and teacher, however, he could rebuke her and urge her to turn from sin.

### Jesus' Claim to Be Light and Truth – 8:12-59

Verse 12

10. What did Jesus claim He is in v12, and what blessing would we have if we follow Him?

11. Explain the meaning of this illustration.

#### *Jesus claimed to be the light of the world.*

Continuing to teach the people, Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, so that people who follow Him are not in darkness but have the light of life. Jesus is often referred to as the "light" (John 1:4; 12:35,36,46; 9:5).

Light illuminates, giving understanding and making things clear (Eph. 5:13; John 3:19-21; Psa. 119:105). As such, it often symbolizes righteousness and truth. Darkness is the opposite. It often symbolizes ignorance, confusion, and evil.

Jesus is the source of true revelation from God (John 1:14,18; Heb. 1:1,2). To learn from Him is to truly understand God's will and purpose for our lives. He shows us how to please God and have eternal life. Hence, we walk in light, not darkness, and have hope of eternal life (1 John 1:5-7).

Jesus' statements were made in the temple court area (v20). Some commentators point out that, in this area, lights were set up for the feast of tabernacles. These would have been extinguished now that the feast was over. Yet, the light from the celebration would be fresh on the people's mind, giving Jesus a good opportunity to illustrate that He could provide spiritual light.

Note that Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, not just of any one portion of people. This would conflict with Jewish expectations. They thought the Messiah would give light to the Jewish nation, but would lead them to victory over their enemies in the world. Jesus' claim to be the light of the world foreshadowed the great truth that all people of all nations can benefit from the gospel.

Verses 13-15

12. What argument did the Pharisees make in v13, and what did they mean by it?

#### *Discussion regarding Jesus' testimony*

Jesus' statement gave occasion for a running debate with the Jewish leaders. They had already determined that they wanted to kill Jesus (7:25,45-52). They had tried repeatedly to trap Him in His teaching. From this point on, the confrontation leads to ongoing conflict.

The Pharisees took up the debate by denying that Jesus could prove such claims as He had just made. They said that He was just making the claim and had no evidence, except just the fact that He Himself claimed it. No other proof could substantiate His claim. They are appealing to the principle that more than one witness is needed to confirm a truth (see on v18). In particular, one person alone could not stand justified on the basis of his own claims. By himself, he would obviously be a biased witness.

But in this case, such argumentation was nonsense on the surface. Jesus had already given them His witnesses in 5:30-47. As He had repeatedly stated, the reason they were unconvinced

was, not that the evidence did not exist, but that they were simply not willing to accept God's will and do it.

Here Jesus responded by saying that, even if He was the only witness, He knew more about His origin than they did. He knew He had come from heaven and would return there. But they had never been in heaven, so how could they give evidence either way about His origin. He may have been just one witness, but He was one witness against none. They had no proof at all. This argument, of course, was adequately convincing for Jesus Himself. He knew He was right. But it would not of itself convince others, which is why He proceeded to give other evidence.

### ***Judging by fleshly standards***

He said the Jews were judging Him by fleshly standards. Such judging would not always be a wrong way to judge. These men had roles in civil government (many of them) and made judgments regarding physical guilt based on physical evidence (such as whether or not a man committed a robbery). These were historical facts that could be determined by considering the physical evidence. That is not necessarily bad, and is even needed in some cases.

But here the issue was where Jesus came from, what His origin was, and therefore what authority He had. This could not be weighed simply by physical means. If His claim was true, He had been in heaven before He came. That could not be examined by physical means but only by spiritual means. He had been in heaven and knew His origin. They had not been there and so could not use their methods to judge the matter like He could (as in v14).

He said that He judged no one. This could mean that He did not make fleshly judgments like they were making. They had a role in making judgments regarding the guilt of criminals, etc., and in determining the punishment they should receive. But that was not His purpose here. He came to save, not to judge. They had tried to make Him a judge to pass sentence on the woman taken in adultery (8:1-11). He had refused, partly because that was not His role here.

This did not mean He would keep quiet about sin and not rebuke it. He did that many times (see notes on 7:7,24). He meant He was not here to pass sentences and state eternal destinies (see on 8:11). He would come later and do that, but not this time.

Nevertheless, there was a sense in which He could make judgments in determining whether or not a teaching was truly from God, etc. This leads to the next verse.

#### **Verses 16-18**

13. What witness did Jesus call in v16?

14. State the Old Testament principle that Jesus appealed to in v17, and list two other places in the Bible that refer to this principle.

15. What two witnesses did Jesus say He had, and where else has He made similar claims?

16. Case Study: Some people claim that Jesus and God the Father are the same individual. What can we prove regarding this from vv 17,18?

### ***Jesus claims the testimony of witnesses.***

Although Jesus had not come to judge in the sense of determining final destinies, however, in a sense He could make judgments and those judgments would be true. For one thing, He could provide and examine evidence regarding the truth of spiritual claims. He could do that because the Father gave Him power to do so. The Father who sent Him was yet with Him (spiritually, not physically).

He could also use the principle of witnesses to determine the truth of historical claims. This was a law they knew and understood. In fact they had alluded to it in v13. The principle was that, in determining the facts of a historical case, and hence in determining the guilt or innocence of one who was claimed to be guilty, two or more witnesses were needed to convict a man. See Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28. They could not judge His origin, since it was spiritual and they had not been there to observe it; yet He

could judge historical matters to determine the truth of an event (though He would not pass sentence, etc.).

In this case, He had more than one witness and had in fact already presented more than one witness for His claims. He had both His own testimony and that of His Father. That makes two witnesses.

How had the Father testified for Jesus? See once again the notes on John 5:30-47. The Father had testified to Jesus through the Old Testament prophecies and through the miracles Jesus did. He also directly spoke from heaven to claim Jesus as His Son and to affirm His confidence in Him at Jesus' baptism and at the Transfiguration (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Other evidence could be given, but the point is that Jesus had already cited this evidence to these people in chap. 5. He did have other witnesses besides Himself, yet they simply refused to accept the evidence.

Note that some people today claim that Jesus and the Father are just different terms to refer to the same person or individual. They claim there is only one individual in the Godhead, and this is Jesus. Hence, "Jesus only." However, if that were true, Jesus would not have two witnesses but only one. Contrary to His claim, He would be "alone." But He said that He and His Father made **two** witnesses. He was **not** alone. Hence, there is more than one person in the Godhead.

**For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our notes on John 1:1-3 and our articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

Verses 19,20

17. What did the Pharisees ask Jesus about His Father, and what answer did He give (v19)?

### ***Jesus accuses the Jews of not knowing the Father.***

Since Jesus claimed the Father as His witness, the Jews naturally asked Him where His Father was. They could not see Him, nor did they know how to contact him, so how could He testify for Jesus? Jesus said they did not know Him or His Father, but if they knew Him, they would know His Father.

This no doubt seemed a riddle to them. How could the Father serve as a witness for Jesus if they did not know Him (see v27)? However, He had already explained in 5:37-47 how the Father bore witness to Him: by the miracles He empowered Jesus to do and by the Scriptures He inspired and which Jesus fulfilled. Yet, they did not recognize what this meant about Jesus. The reason was their attitude.

It was not that they knew nothing about God. You can know about somebody without knowing the person. They knew about Jesus' Father, but did not really know Him in the sense of personally being acquainted with Him as His true servants should be. Their attitude kept them from having a good relationship with Jesus and with His Father. If they had the right attitude, they would have served God properly. This would, in turn, have led them to recognize Jesus when He came. Likewise, a proper relationship with Jesus will lead one to a proper relationship with the father.

Probably, the Jews did not understand what He meant but assumed He was speaking physically, that they just did not know His earthly father. But in fact, His statement was a major criticism of these men who considered themselves so religious and even religious leaders. To say they did not know God would be to state a major insult.

These teachings were given in the treasury of the temple. No one captured Him to kill Him yet because it was still not the proper time. Cf. 7:30,6,44.

Verses 21,22

18. What did Jesus say in v21, and what problem did people have as a result?

***Jesus states His plan to leave them.***

Jesus then repeated that He was going away, and the people could not go where He was going (cf. 7:33-36). They would seek for Him, but would die in their sins (see notes on v24). The Jews could not understand His statement that they could not go where He was going. They wondered if He intended to kill Himself.

Jesus was soon to die and go back to His Father in heaven. They could not go there in several senses. (1) They were not dead, and no one could go where He was going while still alive in the flesh. (2) He was going to heaven, and no humans can go there till after the judgment, even if they die (Luke 16:19ff). (3) These particular people could not go to heaven at all (in their present condition), because of their sins. They were going to die in sin. Which of these ideas Jesus specifically meant I am not sure. Perhaps more than one is implied.

Verse 23

19. Explain v23 in your own words.

***Jesus said He and the Jews were from different places.***

Jesus explained where He was going in terms of where He had come from. He was going back to where He came from. He had come from the Father in heaven and would return there after His death. But they did not understand either where He had come from or where He would go.

They were of the earth beneath, in contrast to heaven above. Their concerns and interests were physical, material. This was why they misunderstood and opposed so much of His teaching. In particular, this was why they took so many of His statements physically, when He meant them spiritually. His thoughts were spiritual in emphasis, relating to eternal life But they continually emphasized physical things.

Verse 24

20. What did Jesus say would happen to the Jews, and what must they do to avoid that fate (v24)?

21. What does this prove about people who follow religious that do not trust in Jesus?

22. Case Study: Some people claim that Jesus never claimed Deity. What can we prove about Jesus' claims in v24?

***Without faith in Jesus, men did in their sins.***

Jesus then stated quite directly one of the great truths of the gospel: All who do not believe in Him will die in their sins. These Jews did not believe in Him, and that is why they were rejecting His teachings. He had said they would die in sin (v21). Here He showed that the reason for this is that they did not believe in Him. Dying in sin was an expression used in the Old Testament to describe people in whose lives sin is so ingrained that they are destined to death apart from God – Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 3:19; 18:24,26.

This was an enormous claim for Him to make. He was teaching that all people had to accept Him for who He claimed to be, or they would be eternally lost. The only way to receive eternal life, then, is by believing in Him. The nature of this claim is such that, if He were an impostor, this claim would be blasphemous. However, if He is who He claimed to be, this truth is essential to our salvation (see notes on 3:15-18; cf. Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; Mark 16:15,16; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16

Consider the consequences of such statements to people who clearly reject Jesus or who even fail to accept Him as the true Son of God, God in the flesh, and Savior of the world. Some

say He was an imposter. Others claim to believe He was a great teacher, but they do not accept Him as the Savior of the world, God in the flesh. Such people cannot be saved, so long as they continue in unbelief. They may be Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. Or they may even claim to be Christians. But the fact is that they do not really believe, so they cannot be saved till they do believe. In fact, as shown in other verses, true saving faith must also include obedience; so even those who do not obey are not true believers

Note also the language “I am (He).” “He” is added by the translators. The original says simply “I am.” The parallel to Ex. 3:14 has led many to claim Jesus is here using for Himself the name of God which is equivalent to Jehovah — the “I am.” Such a claim would surely harmonize with other Scripture in John (1:1-3; 20:28) and elsewhere. See notes on 8:58 where it is even more obvious that such a statement is made as a claim to Deity. In any case, it is clear that men must believe Jesus to be all that He claimed to be, and other passages surely show that means He possessed Deity.

Verses 25-27

23. What did Jesus say was the source of Jesus’ teaching (vv 26,27)? How did people react?

### ***Jesus speaks what He has heard from the Father.***

The Jews showed they did not believe by asking who Jesus was. This was probably said in derision, almost surely in skepticism. He had just made an amazing claim. Who was He to make such claims that people had to believe in Him or die in sin? Jesus had just warned them of the consequences of not believing in Him, and they immediately responded by showing that they truly did not believe in Him. So long as that continued, they could not be saved.

To answer their question regarding who He was, Jesus did not further elaborate; rather, He called their attention to all the things He had already said. There was enough proof in all He had told them, that they should have known who He was. If they did not know by this time, further statements from Him would not convince them; so He did not try. There comes a time when people have enough evidence, and there is nothing we can explain that will help them. Their problem is an attitude problem, not a lack of facts. When that point comes, as with Jesus in this case, we are no longer required to give further facts.

So, Jesus went on, saying that He had other things to say, but there was no point in saying them. He had spoken, not on His own authority, but things given Him by the One who sent Him. They were true, because of the One from whom they came. But the people did not accept them, and did not even understand that He was talking about the Father.

See His similar statements in 12:49; 15:15. Cf. notes on 5:19,30; 14:10.

Verses 28-30

24. Where else have we read about Jesus being “lifted up”? What does the expression mean?

25. What does Jesus teach about His relationship with the Father in vv 28,29?

### ***Jesus claims the Father has sent Him and remains with Him.***

Jesus repeated that what He did and taught was of the Father (see notes on v26). The Father was continuing with Him and had not left Him alone, because He was pleasing the Father. People might oppose His teachings, but Jesus knew He was being true to the Father. He could not change the teaching to please the people, because it was not His to change. It was the Father’s message, and He had to present it as God gave it to Him. This is the true responsibility of every prophet. Of course, being Divine, Jesus completely concurred with the Father’s will and had in fact assented to it before He came to earth.

The point was that, as He continued to give the Father’s message, the Father was on His side, standing with Him, supporting Him. It might appear that He was standing alone, and had

no witnesses to defend Him, but He knew the Father was there and had testified by miracles, etc. (see on 8:13-18).

Note again the claim that the Father had not left Jesus alone. The One who sent Jesus was “with” Him. This is a clear statement that Jesus and His Father were two separate individuals (see on vv 16-18).

He claimed people would see the evidence that these things were true (i.e., they would have even more convincing evidence to believe them), after He had been lifted up. This clearly refers to His death (see notes on 3:14). In 12:32 He claimed that, when He had been lifted up, He would draw all men to Himself. His death would be followed by His resurrection, and this would cause even many of these skeptics to believe. Many did so beginning on Pentecost and the following weeks (Acts 2,3, etc.).

Note Jesus’ claim that He “always” did what pleased the Father. Such a statement amounts to a claim of sinless perfection. Jesus was indeed sinless, as stated elsewhere in Scripture (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). But here we see the claim being made directly from His own mouth. Once again, such a claim would be incredible coming from anyone else.

Jesus set the example for us. Like Him, we must be true to God’s will for us. We must speak the message God has given us. We must not change it, but preach it as given. And we must seek the goal of always doing what pleases Him. If we do so, God will be with us to strengthen and bless us. We will not stand alone.

Note again the expression “I am (He),” and compare to notes on 8:24.

The result of Jesus’ teaching was that many people believed on Him. This faith was immature, so Jesus immediately challenged them to consider what it would take to truly be His disciples (see next verses).

Verses 31,32

26. Define “disciple.” Explain what one must do to be a true disciple (v31).

27. What must one do to have true freedom?

28. In what sense does truth make us free? Does freedom mean we may do as we please? Explain.

29. Application: Name some other ways people mistakenly pursue freedom.

### ***Obedience is essential to true discipleship.***

Jesus informed those Jews, who did believe in Him, that there were necessary conditions to be His disciples indeed. The reaction to His teaching shows that many of them did not have the true devotion to Him that was needed (see vv 33ff). Among other things, this passage shows that people can believe in Jesus yet not really be His disciples. Knowledge and obedience, in addition to faith, are necessary.

A disciple is a follower or learner. The teacher or master gives the instructions, and the disciples learn from the teacher and strive to imitate the principles he lived by and taught (cf. Matt. 10:24,25; Luke 14:26-35). Jesus shows here that true discipleship involves more than just professing or claiming to adhere to a teacher.

A true disciple must abide in the teachings of the Lord. This means the teachings must be obeyed. Faith is essential; but unless the teachings are obeyed, one is not really a disciple. Many passages show that obedience is required in order to please Jesus: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

### ***True freedom requires knowing the truth.***

Besides faith and obedience, one must also know the truth in order to be made free. This freedom refers to freedom from sin, as explained in v34. One who sins is a slave of sin. He is

held under condemnation of God's wrath and eternal punishment. But the gospel gives true freedom by offering forgiveness so we can avoid the consequences of sin. (Col. 1:13).

Many people today seek the kind of "freedom" where they can do as they please without having to submit to anyone else's rules. Such an idea is totally contradictory to discipleship. By definition, a disciple must submit to the Master's rules (Luke 6:46). The person who seeks freedom from restraint actually makes himself a slave to sin and death (Rom. 6:12-23; cf. 2 Peter 2:18,19). True freedom is freedom from sin and its consequences, which freedom is found only in Christ Jesus (cf. v36).

To receive this freedom, one must know and abide in the truth. God's word is truth (John 17:17). Jesus came to reveal the truth (John 14:6; 1:14-18). In religion, all truth is found in the message He gave to His inspired apostles through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Only this truth can free us from sin. No other source can guide us to this complete, infallible truth (Gal. 1:8,9). For other passages about the importance of truth, see Psalm 19:7-11; 25:4,5; 119:47,48,97,140-143,151; Proverbs 23:23; John 1:14,17; Romans 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15,25,26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 1:22,23.

To benefit from the truth (be made free), we must know the truth. This means we must study it. Many passages show the importance of study and meditation in order to know the truths revealed from God: Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Psalms 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:6. Yet even study and knowledge will not make us true disciples, Jesus said, unless we live by the teachings we learn.

These verses are a key statement of the meaning and requirements of discipleship to Jesus.

Verses 33,34

30. What arguments did the Jews make to try to prove they did not need to be made free? (Thought question: Were these arguments valid? Explain.)
31. What kind of bondage was Jesus talking about (v34)? Explain.

### ***The Jews claim freedom as Abraham's descendants.***

The Jews reacted by implying they did not need to be made free. This claim may have come, not from the "many" who were beginning to believe (v30), but from the opponents who were also in the audience and had been disputing with Jesus all along.

If Jesus was offering freedom, they thought they did not need it. Proud and conceited in their national heritage, they said they were descendants of Abraham and had never been slaves to anyone. Jews thought the mere fact they were descendants of Abraham guaranteed them a special status with God and man.

Their statement was untrue on the surface. At the very time they spoke, they were slaves to Rome. It was well-known in their history that they had been in bondage in Egypt and later in Babylon. And the reason for this physical bondage was because of the greater bondage to which Jesus here referred. They had gone into captivity as punishment for sin.

Their statement was inaccurate; but more important, it completely missed the point of what Jesus meant. He was again speaking spiritually, while they were thinking physically. He was referring to bondage to sin. Here He spoke directly about what their real problem was. He had used illustrations and implications, but they continued to miss the point. Finally, He came out with a direct accusation of sin. This, of course, provoked further disputation from the hearers.

Spiritually, anyone who commits sin is in bondage to it (see notes on v32; cf. Rom. 6:12-23; 2 Peter 2:19; 2 Tim. 2:25,26). These people, like all of us, had committed sin. Worse yet, in their case, they were refusing to come to Jesus to be forgiven. So, they were slaves and would remain such till they were willing to submit to Him. The same is true of all today who commit sin and do not repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. So long as a person is convinced He has no problem, He will seek no solution.

Verses 35,36

32. Who can free a slave (vv 35,36)? Who can free us from spiritual slavery?

***A slave can be freed by the Son.***

Jesus then extended the illustration of slavery. They were slaves because of sin, despite their claim to the contrary. One who is truly a son in a family, is in the family forever. His ancestral lineage cannot be changed. This seemed to be their concept of their favor with Abraham and therefore with God. They thought they were descendants of Abraham and therefore needed no one to make them free.

But Jesus' response shows that they were really slaves and not children. Their sins had made them slaves to sin. Slaves were in bondage and could be transferred from own household to another, if the master chose. In particular, these Jews could, despite their physical descent from Abraham, be transferred from the household of God to the household of Satan. In fact, Jesus would soon accuse them of having already become members of Satan's family, because they were acting according to Satan's will instead of God's (cf. Rom. 6:12-23). Once again, Jesus' illustration referred to spiritual bondage and spiritual families, but the people missed the point because they thought only of material bondage and earthly families.

However, being a free man (v32) is different from being a slave. Slaves can transfer ownership, but a free man is no longer a slave. Such freedom can be granted only by a member of the household where one is enslaved — a son in this case. As the Son in the Father's house, Jesus could purchase them from their slavery to sin and set them free (as described in v32). They could not achieve this for themselves, nor could anyone outside the family (Deity) grant it.

Note that, if one becomes a free man, this does not guarantee he will remain free. He can so conduct himself as to once again become enslaved. The same is true spiritually. The fact Jesus offered freedom to them and to us, does not of itself guarantee we will remain free. We remain free so long as we continue in the truth and in abiding in Jesus' word - vv 31,32.

Hence, despite their claims, the Jews did need to become Jesus' disciples so they could be made free. In fact, as the only Son who always has and always will abide in the Father's spiritual house, only the Son could make them free.

Verses 37-40

33. In what sense were the people Abraham's descendants, and in what sense were they not His descendants?

34. What proof did Jesus offer that they were not Abraham's descendants?

***Jesus further distinguishes spiritual families from earthly families.***

Jesus took His point further by demonstrating that their nature did not partake of that of true children of Abraham. He acknowledged that they were Abraham's descendants in the flesh, but not in spirit. The immediate proof that they were not Abraham's spiritual descendants was that they sought to kill Jesus because they had rejected His word. Such was sinful and demonstrated their bondage to sin (v34). This was the bondage Jesus had warned them about and for which He had offered the solution.

One's spiritual family membership is demonstrated by the Father one obeys (Matt. 12:46-50). Jesus was obeying God the heavenly Father and was speaking His word. This demonstrated His true Sonship to His Father in heaven. The Jews were also following what they had learned from their father. But they were rejecting Jesus, so they did not have the same Father He had. He would later identify their spiritual father (v44).

The Jews had often emphasized the physical, when they should have emphasized the spiritual. Here they were confusing physical family with spiritual family. They thought physical lineage from Abraham made them pleasing to God. Jesus said that physical descent does not guar-

antee membership in God's family. Sin made them the equivalent of slaves and as such they could be transferred into another family — that of Satan.

### ***Jesus denies the Jews' claim to Abraham as their father.***

Jesus had accused the Jews of having a different father from his father. This led the Jews to repeat their claim that Abraham was their father. They continued to think physically while Jesus spoke spiritually.

Jesus again disputed their claim to be Abraham's descendants by calling attention to their works or conduct. He had already acknowledged that they were Abrahams' physical descendants. But if they were true children of Abraham (spiritually), they would act like Abraham. Instead, they were trying to kill one who told them the truth from God. Abraham would never do such a thing. Therefore, they could not really be Abraham's descendants, again meaning spiritually.

Verses 41,42

35. Whom did the Jews claim as their Father, and how did Jesus prove they were mistaken?

### ***The Jews then claim God as their father.***

Jesus continued to emphasize that conduct indicates whom one has for a spiritual father. In particular, He said that the deeds of the Jews proved who their father was.

The Jews then caught on that He was not talking about physical descent, so they claimed their Father was God. They knew that, if they were following some other spiritual father (such as an idol), they would be born of fornication spiritually — they would be illegitimate. They were supposed to be children of God. If they had another father, they would be illegitimate.

But their claim did not help their case, because Jesus' argument was based on their works. If they were true children of God, they would have recognized Jesus as having come from God and would have loved and served Him. He had given them abundant proof that He was from God, yet they still rejected Him. This proved they were not obeying God, and therefore God was not their spiritual Father. Their deeds belied their claims.

Verses 43,44

36. Who did Jesus say their father was? How did He say they showed who their father was? (Thought question: What lessons can we learn from this about rebuking sin and "judge not"?)

37. Name two characteristics Jesus said their father has.

38. List examples that demonstrate that their "father" possesses these characteristics.

39. Special Assignment: Explain how the Jews' conduct demonstrated that they followed the will of their "father."

### ***Jesus identifies Satan as the father of the Jews.***

Again, as He had done repeatedly, Jesus explained that the problem that kept them from understanding and accepting His message lay within them. It was not any inadequacy in His message. It was because they were not really listening. They were instead following the desires of their spiritual father. The same reason explains why many people today do not respond to the gospel message of Jesus. It is not because there is any inadequacy in the message, nor necessarily because we have failed to present it clearly. The problem is in the hearts of the listeners.

He had said that God was not their father. Here He stated who their father was: the Devil. They were doing what the devil wanted them to do, so he was their father. The desire to do things other than what God says is what keeps many people from obeying God, and in many cases it keeps them from even understanding what God wants them to do.

Jesus then described the Devil whom they were serving. He is a murderer (i.e., an instigator of murder) and has been from the beginning. Cain, the son of the first man and woman, mur-

dered his own brother. Clearly, Jesus is saying that Satan tempted Cain to that sin. And Satan is the father of lies for there is no truth in him. The Devil lied to Eve in the garden, and from then on has used lies and deceit to lead people to reject God's will. The result of His original lie was that death came into the world, and all men die ultimately because of him.

In particular, Jesus is here explaining why they believed the lie that Jesus was a sinner and why they wanted to kill Him. He was speaking the truth, but they were listening to the Devil instead. The Devil, who was a liar and murderer, was deceiving them to accept a lie about Jesus and to want to murder Him.

Note how plainly Jesus here rebuked the sins of these Jews. To claim on the basis of John 8:1-11 that Jesus did not believe in rebuking people for their sin is to contradict the whole context. Throughout these chapters Jesus was thoroughly rebuking people for sin, very plainly and publicly.

Verses 45-47

40. What challenge did Jesus give the Jews in v46? How does this challenge show Jesus' confidence in His position?

41. What reason did Jesus offer why the Jews rejected Him?

### ***The Jews did not believe, because they were not of God.***

The Devil was the source of lies, and the people were following his lies. It follows that they would reject what Jesus was saying, because it was the truth. They preferred the Devil's lies. When Jesus told the truth, they rejected it. This is a perfect example of the teaching of John 3:19-21.

However, He further challenged them, if they had determined He was worthy of death, on what grounds would they convict Him? What sin could they convict Him of? They needed evidence of guilt if they were to kill Him, and they had none. They could not convict Him of any sin whatever, let alone anything worthy of death. Yet they sought to kill Him.

Note the boldness of Jesus' claim here. He openly challenged the worst of His enemies to demonstrate proof that He had committed sin. It is amazing that anyone would make such a claim. None besides Him would attempt it. But more amazing still is the fact that the people had no response. Jesus would not have made the claim had He been a sinner like others, for He would have known they could convict Him of sin. But He made the claim; and sure enough, the people could not convict Him! See Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

On the other hand, He argued that if they could not convict Him of sin, then they should consider the evidence for His claims. He had given much evidence in miracles, etc. If they could not prove Him to be in error, then they should accept His message as true and believe it.

But the bottom line, as He had so often stated, was that they were rejecting His words because they were not of God. If they were really determined to please God and really concerned about God's will, they would have recognized the truth of His claims and would have accepted Him. The reason they did not do so was simply that they were not of God.

Verses 48-50

42. How did the Jews try to explain away Jesus' teaching (v48)?

43. Instead of the Jews' explanation, how did Jesus explain His conduct?

44. To whom did Jesus appeal for final judgment (v50)?

### ***The Jews accuse Jesus of having a demon.***

The Jews had reached the point that they had no sensible answers to the factual evidence Jesus had presented. He had called on them, if they could, to convict Him of sin. They responded by saying He was a Samaritan and had a demon. This constituted nothing but unfounded name calling. Calling a Jew a Samaritan would be considered a great insult (see on 4:9).

They had on other occasions accused Him of having a demon (cf. 7:20. 8:52; 10:20; Matthew 9:34: 12:24ff; Mark 3:22ff). But they made no effort whatever to answer His evidence or to prove their claims.

Similar things often happen today. When we show people the evidence they are wrong, but they cannot answer the evidence, they will often make unfounded personal attacks in an effort to discredit the teachers. They will call names implying wild accusations, but anyone can sling insulting epithets. It is entirely another matter to prove someone is in sin.

Jesus flatly denied their charge. He was speaking, not for any such reasons as they attributed to Him, but to honor His father and seek His Father's glory (cf. 7:18). He then affirmed there would be a judgment, implying that at that judgment He would be vindicated and the people would be proved wrong.

Verses 51-53

45. What claim did Jesus make in v51?

46. In what sense was Jesus' statement true?

47. How did the Jews say Abraham and the prophets disproved Jesus' claim?

### ***Jesus claims that those who serve Him will not die.***

Jesus then made another claim for His teaching: those who keep His word will never see death (cf. 6:50,51). This is referring, of course, to eternal life in contrast to the second death. And note again that eternal life does not come simply by believing; Jesus said we must "keep" His word. Here is another verse that plainly teaches that obedience is necessary in order to avoid eternal death. And it is surely a claim that Jesus is Deity. What mere human, even a prophet, would make such a claim?

The Jews, for the zillionth time, take a spiritual statement and think it is physical. They think of physical death and say this statement proved Jesus had a demon. They pointed out that Abraham and the prophets all died. So how could Jesus keep people from death? Such a claim, they reasoned, was a claim to be greater than Abraham and the prophets. So who did Jesus think He was?

Their answer ignored the fact that Jesus was speaking of spiritual life and death, not physical. Abraham and the prophets could receive that even though they died physically.

Nevertheless, they had hit upon the real issue. The major question to be resolved, and the question for which they were giving all the wrong answers, is the question of who Jesus is. Jesus really was claiming to be greater than Abraham and the prophets. To these Jews, such a claim would automatically prove Him to be wrong — how could anyone be greater than Abraham? But again, they overlooked the evidence. What should it be thought impossible that anyone could be greater than Abraham? Consider the evidence. Don't appeal to prejudice.

Verses 54,55

48. Who did Jesus say honored Him? What accusation did He make against them?

### ***Jesus sought to honor His true Father, whom the Jews did not know.***

Jesus responded that He had not said what He did for the sake of honoring Himself. He came to earth to offer people a way to eternal life. He did not need to do that to be worthy of honor. He did it to save men. If He had honored Himself, it would have done no real good. What mattered was the honor His Father gave Him.

Jesus then identified His Father, whom He had frequently referred to throughout the discussion. He plainly said that His Father is the One they called their God. God is His Father, and He was the One who gave Jesus glory. If God gave Him glory, how could the Jews refuse to do likewise?

But Jesus again explained that the reason they did not accept any of His claims was that they did not have a right relationship with God. Their wrong attitude toward God is what kept them from accepting Him.

Jesus, however, did have a right relationship with God. If He had admitted (as they thought He should) that He did not have a right relationship with God, that would be telling a lie. By charging Him with being a demon and speaking false testimony, they were trying to get Him to agree to a lie. He could not do that.

Then He went to the heart of His rebuke of them. He had said they were doing the will of their father the Devil, who is the father of lies (v44). Here He plainly called these Jews liars like their father! He said, further, that He would be a liar like them, if He denied His relationship with God.

The nature of the conflict made it clear that someone was lying. They had claimed that God was their Father and that Jesus was making claims He could not prove. Jesus had denied their position and said God was His Father and they were in error. Someone was lying about it. Jesus and they could not both be right. Since Jesus affirmed He was right, He stated the conclusion that followed — the Jews were the ones who were lying.

Note once again the plain and severe rebuke of error here. How can anyone believe that 8:1-11 or “judge not” passages mean that Jesus objected to plain rebukes of sin? Jesus had said these men were children of the Devil and liars. How much more plain and forceful can rebukes be? How can it be un-Christlike for us to rebuke sin in light of Jesus’ own example?

And note further that Jesus recognized that two such conflicting and contradictory views cannot both be right. Today people want to claim that folks in all the denominations are acceptable to God, despite the fact their doctrines directly contradict one another. Jesus knew this cannot be so. When people so completely contradict one another, someone has to be in error!

Verses 56-68

49. What did Jesus say about Abraham that confirmed Jesus’ claims (v56)? (Thought question: In what sense was this statement true?)
50. What reason did the Jews give for claiming Jesus’ statement was impossible?
51. How did Jesus respond to their claim? What did this mean regarding His relationship to Abraham?
52. Special Assignment: Note the expression “I AM.” List an Old Testament passage where God used this expression for Himself. Explain its significance.
53. Explain the consequences of Jesus’ statement — i.e., what really was He claiming? Why did the Jews want to stone Him for saying this?

### ***Jesus claims eternal existence from before the time of Abraham.***

Though Jesus had not originally made any statements with the intent of comparing Himself to Abraham, yet they had introduced Abraham into the discussion and had implied that Jesus could not possibly be as great as Abraham (v53). Jesus therefore affirmed that Abraham had seen His day and was glad or rejoiced in it.

How did this happen? Probably this refers to the promise in which God had told Abraham that all nations would be blessed in His seed (Gen. 12:3 and parallels). This was fulfilled by Jesus (Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:16). The point is that Abraham honored Jesus. He knew prophetically that one would come who would be a blessing to all nations (though doubtless he did not fully understand it). He rejoiced in the promise and in the knowledge that it would be fulfilled through his ancestors.

The Jews, thinking physically as always, argued that Jesus was less than fifty years old, so He could not possibly have seen Abraham who had been dead for years. Again they missed the point, but rather than explain it, Jesus used it to press another truth about Himself. The fact was that Jesus was not just fifty years old. He assured them, “Before Abraham was, I am.”

What an amazing statement! First, Jesus affirmed that He had in fact existed before Abraham (contrary to their idea). That would have been amazing enough to claim. But He could have made that claim simply by saying, "Before Abraham was, I **was**." Instead He said, "I **am**." This affirmed a continuing state of existence before Abraham came into existence. Jesus was claiming **eternal** existence (see notes on John 1:1-3).

Indeed, still more, Jesus used for Himself the unique name of Deity used in Ex. 3:13-15 (see also Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10,14; 46:4; 48:12). In some passages where Jesus used a similar expression, it may be less obvious that He was using a name of Deity for Himself. Here there can be no doubt. He was calling Himself Deity. The context and manner of usage can lead to no other honest conclusion. The response of the Jews in v59 (see below) demonstrates that they understood the significance of His claim. See notes on 8:24.

The Jews had continually tried to belittle Jesus and His claims. He responded by making His claims greater and more obvious. He would not back down and accept the diminished position they sought to give. He would not even accept equality with Abraham, great as he had been. Jesus claimed eternal existence and the position of Deity!

Verses 59

54. How did the confrontation end?

### ***The Jew seek to stone Jesus for His claims.***

The Jews recognized the significance of Jesus' statement. He was claiming Deity. Of course, His works confirmed His claims, so they should have recognized Him for who He was. But their preconceived ideas would not allow them to accept that He was so great. And since His claims were blasphemous, if they were not true, they determined to stone Him. However, it was still not time for Him to die, so He hid Himself, passed through the midst, and left.

This whole encounter is an amazing statement from Jesus, as plain as any in Scripture, in which He plainly rebuked the people and plainly affirmed His Deity.

© Copyright David E. Pratte, August 25, 2007

These study notes are copyrighted but are made available free to individuals for personal study.

They must not be reproduced for distribution (other individuals may download their own copy from our web site). In no case may these commentaries be reproduced in any form for sale or a financial fee. All rights reserved. To see our copyright guidelines for more details go to

[www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)

**For other free Bible commentary study notes, please visit**

[www.gospelway.com/commentary/index.php](http://www.gospelway.com/commentary/index.php).

**To find topical study notes or online Bible courses about Bible topics, Christianity, and Christian doctrine, see the following links:**

**Free online Bible Study Courses & Lessons – [www.biblestudylessons.com](http://www.biblestudylessons.com)**

**Study our Online Bible Study Guides (the Gospel Way) – [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)**

**Free e-mail Bible study newsletter - [www.gospelway.com/update\\_subscribe.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/update_subscribe.htm)**

**Information about copyright permission or restrictions - [www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)**