



## The Gospel of John - Chapter Nine

### **II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues)**

#### **II.c John 5:1-10:42 - Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs (continues)**

##### Summary of Chapter Nine

It appears that Jesus is back in Jerusalem since the man is sent to wash in the pool of Siloam, but Jesus is no longer in hiding (8:59). It is probable that some time has elapsed since his confrontation with the authorities in the temple, although as the story reads he could be coming straight from their debate. Certainly John intends a connection to be made between this healing with the previous chapter, as the references to Jesus as the light of the world indicate.

Jesus and his disciples encounter a man born blind, which the disciples immediately believe is a result of sin, but was it his or his parents they ask? Jesus response shows that the condition was not to do with cause but with purpose; it was that God's power might be revealed. Jesus makes some mud with his own spittle, rubs it on the man's eyes and sends him to wash his face in the pool of Siloam. Immediately, the man's sight is restored, revealing God's power as Jesus had said.

Once healed, the man is taken to the Pharisees and recounts what has happened to him but these leaders accuse Jesus of sinning because it had occurred on the Sabbath. The man's parents were called who verified that he had been blind and could now see but would not commit themselves as to how this could be for fear of upsetting the Pharisees.

The man appeared before them a second time and was again asked what had happened. He was clearly annoyed at their failure to recognise that something quite unique had occurred. An argument ensued that ended with the man being driven out of the synagogue.

Jesus has a further encounter with the healed man and reveals himself as the Son of Man, which results in the man coming to faith and worshipping Jesus. Some Pharisees nearby challenge Jesus over his claims but are told they remain in their sin because of their spiritual blindness.

## II.c.ix John 9:1-41 - Jesus Heals a Blind Man

Jesus has just revealed himself as the light of the world and has passed judgment on the leaders among the Jews and, indeed, on the temple itself. Now he heals a man born blind, thus giving a sign that bears witness to his claim to be the light of the world. He also continues to condemn the opponents by accusing them of being blind spiritually, a far worse condition than the physical blindness of the man he has healed.

In the midst of these continuing themes a new element is added. When the Jewish authorities cast the healed blind man out of the synagogue, Jesus begins to form a body of disciples that are clearly separate from the synagogue. Thus the break between Jesus and the Jewish authorities is now seen to characterise his followers also. This separation brings to a head the crisis that has been building for several chapters. Chapter 5 revealed Jesus as the true referent of the law, while Chapters 6 through to 8 showed Jesus to be the fulfilment of Judaism as represented by its feasts and temple. Now Jesus is forming a new community apart from the institutions of Judaism, with himself as its centre and guide. Thus, the story of the man born blind provides a sign regarding not only Jesus, but also his opponents and the community of those believing in Jesus.

### II.c.ix.1 John 9:1-12 - A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

Whilst walking through Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples encounter a man, blind from birth. Jesus answers the concerns of his disciples about the cause of the blindness by healing the man, restoring his sight and revealing God's power.

<sup>1</sup> As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

#### John 9:1-2

Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? The disciples' question reflects the assumption, customary in ancient Judaism, that suffering could be traced to sin. The underlying concern, well-intentioned, but misguided, was not to charge God with perpetrating evil on innocent people: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me*>> (Exodus 20:5), <<*The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation*>> (Numbers 14:18), and: <<*You say, "God stores up their iniquity for their children." Let it be paid back to them, so that they may know it*>> (Job 21:19). These commands were later countermanded through God's prophet: <<*The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own*>> (Ezekiel 18:20). The NT makes clear that suffering is not always a direct result of a person's sin, for example: <<*He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galilæans*

*suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galilæans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did>> (Luke 13:2-3), <<Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated>> (2 Corinthians 12:7b), and: <<You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you>> (Galatians 4:13). Jesus' crucifixion is the ultimate example of someone's suffering that was not linked to sin: <<For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin>> (Hebrews 4:15).*

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.'

### John 9:3

Neither this man nor his parents sinned. The disciples' question was a request that Jesus comment on this debate. Jesus shifts the focus, and instead of addressing the cause of the man's blindness he speaks of its purpose, as he will also announce when Lazarus dies: <<*But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it'*>> (John 11:4).

He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him indicates that God in his mysterious and wise providence sometimes allows his children to go through hardship and suffering so that they can experience God's mercy and power in delivering them.

Trying to figure out the source of suffering in an individual's life is futile given humankind's limited understanding, as the book of Job teaches. Rather, here is one in whom Jesus can manifest God's works and thus reveal something of God himself and his purposes on earth. Jesus is being led by his Father to provide a sign that he is indeed the light of the world. In this sign, he continues to reveal the Father's glory, that is, his love and mercy. For the ultimate truth about Jesus' works is that the Father, living in him, is doing his own works: <<*Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works*>> (John 14:10).

Scripture describes four types of suffering viewed in terms of its causes or purposes:

1. Suffering as a means of proving or testing faith as seen in Genesis Chapter 22, Deuteronomy 8:2 and the book of Job.
2. Suffering meant for improvement, for edification; see Hebrews 12:5-8.
3. Suffering as punishment for sin, as seen in Deuteronomy 32:15-25, Jeremiah 30:15 and John 5:14.
4. Suffering that shows forth God's glory, as here and later in the raising of Lazarus (11:4).

To these should be added a fifth form of suffering, that which comes from bearing witness to Christ, illustrated by what happens to this former blind man when he is cast out of the synagogue.

<sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

#### John 9:4

We must work the works of him who sent me shows that Jesus intends his disciples to be involved in the good works of God. Following Jesus is not simply a passive role of observation but one where he expects his followers to act on his behalf for he is with them by his Spirit. Jesus' disciples are to share in his relationship with the Father and thereby in the revelation of the Father's glory through doing the work of the Father and in the judgment of the world.

While it is day refers to the time when Jesus is here in his earthly ministry, for he is 'the light of the world', whose presence makes everything day: <<*Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world'*>> (John 11:9).

Night is coming when no one can work. This would then be the time of Jesus' crucifixion and death, a time when many would start to stumble: <<*Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going'*>> (John 12:35). Jesus shows an intense awareness of the need to fulfil all that the Father had sent him to accomplish during his earthly ministry.

<sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

#### John 9:5

I am the light of the world. This is the second time Jesus has referred to himself in this way, but this time he adds the caveat: as long as I am in the world. Refer to the comments made on John 8:12.

When the light is absent it is night, and the night for John is when Jesus is absent. Thus, the night seems to be the time when Jesus is absent from the world between his death and resurrection, since thereafter the Spirit will be present (20:22) who will continue Jesus' work through the disciples. This makes most sense of vv.4-5, removing any apparent contradictions.

<sup>6</sup> When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup> saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

#### John 9:6-7

It is unclear why Jesus made mud and put it on the man's eyes. There may be an echo of God's creative activity: <<*then the Lord God formed man from the dust*>>

*of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being*>> (Genesis 2:7), compared with: <<*When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’*>> (John 20:22); the Creator is now re-creating.

Irenæus picks up this allusion when he interprets this story in the light of the creation of man from the ground, for ‘the work of God is the fashioning of man’. Thus, ‘that which the artificer, the Word, had omitted to form in the womb, (namely, the blind man’s eyes), He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be manifested in him’ (Irenæus Against Heresies 5.15.2).

Jesus used similar techniques in other recorded healings, such as: <<*He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue*>> (Mark 7:33), and: <<*He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’*>> (Mark 8:23).

The pool of Siloam. This site had been associated in both scholarly and tourist literature with a pool connected with the remains of a Byzantine, i.e. 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century AD church toward the south of the Temple Mount at the terminus of Hezekiah’s tunnel, which brings water from the Gihon Spring. However, additional work just southeast of the traditional site has unearthed a much larger pool, which is 225 feet or 69m long on one side, with steps leading down into it. This larger pool contains Hasmonæan-era, i.e. circa 165-63BC, coins embedded in the plaster and remains of late Second Temple, that is pre-AD 70, artefacts resting in the pool itself, dating the large pool to the time before and during the NT. It seems most likely that this is the location of the pool of Siloam referred to here. This miracle is one of several events in John in which the events in the physical world are a sign that points to a deeper spiritual meaning. Here Jesus gives sight to a man born blind, but this is also an evident symbol that Jesus, ‘the light of the world’ (v.5), brings the light of the knowledge of God.



The Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem

Then he went and washed and came back able to see. At times Jesus healed people immediately, on other occasions he healed them without even attending them personally. However, here he requires the man to travel to the pool and back. Why? There must be something involved here that contributes to the revealing of God's work. Perhaps the man's obedience is significant, revealing that he shares a chief characteristic of Jesus' true disciples. Like Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5:10-14, this man obeys God's command to go and wash and is healed. Also like Naaman, he is able to bear witness to God as a result (2 Kings 5:15). However, John's parenthetical note that Siloam means Sent suggests more than the man's obedience is involved, for Jesus is the one sent by God! Thus, both the healing itself and the details involved point to Jesus as the Messiah. Here is an example of the triumph of the light over the darkness (1:5).

<sup>8</sup> The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' <sup>9</sup> Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' <sup>10</sup> But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' <sup>11</sup> He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' <sup>12</sup> They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

### John 9:8-12

Is this not the man who used to sit and beg? Beggars with various disabilities were a familiar sight throughout Judæa and the Jews tended to give alms quite freely to help those less fortunate than themselves. Thus they would have been well known to the local inhabitants, as was the cripple who would be later healed by Peter and John: <<*All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognised him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*>> (Acts 3:9-10).

The man returns to the place where Jesus had placed the mud on his eyes. Jesus and his disciples had moved on but the man's friends and neighbours were there and were bewildered to find that the man could now see. I am the man again uses the Greek *egō eimi*, although here it does not allude to the divine name but is used as an identification formula, stressing that this is indeed the man who was known to be blind and can now see.

Then how were your eyes opened? This question will be asked four times in this story, stressing that something highly unusual has taken place, something that cannot be explained in the categories of this world.

### II.c.ix.2 John 9:13-34 - The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

The friends and neighbours of the healed man take him to the Pharisees because they realise a miracle has occurred and the Pharisees are the acknowledged experts in such matters. The man recounts what has happened to him.

The Pharisees response is quite astonishing. Rather than recognising this sign from God they denounce Jesus as a sinner who cannot be from God for he heals on a Sabbath. The man who was formerly blind believes Jesus to be a prophet.

The Pharisees then cross-examine the man's parents to ascertain that he had indeed been blind. The parents confirm the facts but will not be drawn on the manner of the healing for they feared the consequences of supporting Jesus publically, as the Pharisees had already warned that anyone doing so would be put out of the synagogue.

The healed man is recalled a second time and made to recount his story. He becomes exasperated with these leaders and is embroiled in an argument about the true identity of Jesus as a man of God. The result is the man is driven out of the synagogue because of his understanding of whom Jesus might be and the spiritual blindness of those questioning him.

<sup>13</sup> They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

<sup>14</sup> Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

#### John 9:13-14

They refers to the neighbours and other acquaintances recorded in v.8. There is nothing sinister in them taking the man to the Pharisees for they were the acknowledged experts on such matters and should be informed about what had happened.

The belated mention of the Sabbath recalls the earlier Sabbath controversy in John Chapter 5. Jesus had kneaded the clay with his saliva to make mud, and kneading dough, and therefore by analogy clay, was included among the 39 classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath (Mishnah, Shabbat 7.2). Jesus' frequent conflicts with the Jews over the Sabbath suggest that by his coming he is changing the Sabbath requirements. In fact, in another Sabbath controversy, Jesus declared himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath, refer to Matthew 12:1-14.

Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. The phrasing here indicates that Jesus did more than restore the man's physical sight, he opened up his heart to the things of God that would enable him in time to recognise the Lordship of Jesus. This had been the prayer of Elisha that his servants eyes would be opened to the protective ring of God: <<*Then Elisha prayed: 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.'* So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha>> (2 Kings 6:17).

<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' <sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. <sup>17</sup> So they

said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’

### John 9:15-17

Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. The man had recounted his healing in full to his neighbours and acquaintances but here his retelling is brief and to the point. Perhaps he was in awe of these men or perhaps he feared their ruling for he had been a participant in Sabbath breaking.

This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath. The Pharisees seemed blind to what Jesus was doing (v.40). All they could comprehend was that he was doing things on the Sabbath day that their interpretation of the law did not permit. They frequently charged him or his disciples with such misdemeanours: <<*The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?’*>> (Mark 2:24).

How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs? Some of the Pharisees believed that Jesus was a sinner and is not from God, but others disagreed based on the evidence of his healing. Thus there was division within the group. The division among his opponents bears witness to Jesus’ identity as the light of the world. But here the light is shining through this man’s testimony, providing an example of what all disciples are to do in the future. The use of the plural signs indicates that some in the group were familiar with other works of Jesus.

When the man was asked for his opinion of Jesus, his response was brief yet decisive: he is a prophet. This would indicate that the man was clear in his own mind that Jesus was from God, a point he would argue more strongly later. It is ironic that these Jewish leaders, who are so proud of their possession of the law and their ability to evaluate religious claims, are asking this man for his opinion on a religious matter. Others, too, recognised Jesus as a prophet: <<*The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee’*>> (Matthew 21:11), but he is, of course, so much more.

<sup>18</sup> The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight <sup>19</sup> and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ <sup>20</sup> His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup> but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.’ <sup>22</sup> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup> Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

### John 9:18-23

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight. Had the man testified on his own then the Pharisees would have been right to call more witnesses as they had argued when Jesus had apparently testified on his own

(8:13). However, on this occasion those who knew the man to have been blind had brought him to the Pharisees and this in itself should have been sufficient testimony. Since they did not accept them as witnesses they called the parents of the man who had received his sight. These two people confirmed the testimony of their son in as much as saying that he was born blind but would offer no support to his story that Jesus had healed him: but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes.

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews. The fear of the parents highlights one of the fundamental reasons in John why many do not believe. They fear people more than God: <<*How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?*>> (John 5:44), and: <<*Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God*>> (John 12:42-43). This does not refer to all Jews, for the parents were Jews themselves. The expression, as often in John, refers here to the Jewish leaders who were opposed to Jesus, and to the ordinary people who followed their lead.

To be put out of the synagogue would mean total exclusion from all religious and many social activities, thus making the person a social outcast. Jesus knew that this would happen to those who decide to follow him: <<*Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man*>> (Luke 6:22).

The parents' fear stems from the threat that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. Such exclusion was used in the OT: <<*They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if any did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles*>> (Ezra 10:7-8), and later sources speak of different degrees of exclusion that were exercised, from a week-long exclusion from the congregation, to a thirty-day exclusion, to an unlimited exclusion from the congregation with avoidance of all contact, to an exclusion from the entire community of Israel.

At the time of Jesus one of the lighter forms may have been exercised, and this continued to be the case for some time, as Paul's example indicates, for he was thrown out of local synagogues, for example: <<*For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judæa, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16), but was not viewed as an outcast from the people of Israel. Later in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, as the gulf between followers of Jesus and the synagogue widened, the harshest form of exclusion came into force.

He is of age; ask him. This indicates that the man was at least thirteen years old and was of the legal age of consent. He may, of course, have been much older. The parents are not willing to side with Jesus for healing their son and thereby risk the wrath of the Pharisees. Therefore, they pass responsibility back on their son.

The parents' agony would have been very great, given their guilt over the possibility that it was their sin that had been responsible for their son's blindness. In such a situation Jesus' healing would have far-reaching implications concerning God's gracious acceptance of sinful humanity. Not only was their son released from the bondage of his blindness and its related life of begging, but they and their son would see themselves in a new relationship to God. Yet they had to stifle all of these feelings of joy and gratitude when they were called in by the authorities for questioning.

<sup>24</sup> So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.'<sup>25</sup> He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'

#### John 9:24-25

Give glory to God! The Pharisees recall the man for the second time for further cross-examination. They first denounce Jesus as a sinner, despite the division in their own ranks (v.16), and expect the man to confirm their judgement by confessing his own guilt: <<*Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me'*>> (Joshua 7:19), thus providing them with a witness statement they could use against Jesus. The Pharisees are demanding that the man give glory to God by confessing his sin, but the man has given glory to God by bearing witness to Jesus.

The man is non-committal in his response although by recounting the outcome, I was blind, now I see, he sticks to the facts rather than indulging in speculation over whether a sin has been committed. This man's honesty and integrity should have been sufficient evidence for them to rule in Jesus' favour.

<sup>26</sup> They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'<sup>27</sup> He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?'<sup>28</sup> Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.'<sup>29</sup> We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.'<sup>30</sup> The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.'<sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.'<sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.'<sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'

## John 9:26-33

Do you also want to become his disciples? The man's answer may seem facetious in the circumstances and was probably at least almost sarcastic; however, his use of also does reveal that he wishes to become a disciple.

You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. The Pharisees are right in as far as it goes that indeed God has spoken to Moses. The Pharisees insist that a choice must be made between being a disciple of Jesus and being a disciple of Moses, at least as they understand Moses. It is one of John's purposes to show how Moses and the Scriptures actually witness against the opponents and to Jesus, who had already stated: *<<If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me>>* (John 5:46).

But as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. The Pharisees once again condemn Jesus by saying they do not know where he comes from, a major theme of Chapter 7-8. But now someone stands up to them and uses what they think is a charge against Jesus as a condemnation of themselves.

The man's major premise, that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will, reflects a theme in several OT passages, for example: *<<The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry>>* (Psalm 34:15), *<<If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened>>* (Psalm 66:18), *<<When he is tried, let him be found guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin>>* (Psalm 109:7), *<<He fulfils the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them>>* (Psalm 145:19), *<<The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous>>* (Proverbs 15:29), *<<When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood>>* (Isaiah 1:15), *<<Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective>>* (James 5:16), *<<And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him>>* (1 John 5:14-15). Earlier the man refused to say whether Jesus was a sinner (v.25), but now he makes it very clear what he thinks: If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

The man's minor premise, that there was no precedent for the opening of the eyes of a person born blind, is also confirmed by the absence of similar instances in the OT or extra-biblical sources. The man's conclusion concurs with the common Jewish view that miracles were performed in answer to prayer, indicated by the comments of Nicodemus: *<<He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'>>* (John 3:2).

<sup>34</sup> They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

## John 9:34

You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us? This statement reveals the Pharisees' arrogance, their poor attitude toward ordinary Jews and their unteachable hearts. Instead of facing up to the evidence the once-blind man has presented they throw back at him his blindness as evidence of his sinfulness. They refuse to entertain the possible implications of his healing, that is, that he is accepted by God. These men, who had asked him for his opinion earlier (v.17), now show their true contempt for him.

The word for sinner is rare in John and appears only on the four occurrences in this chapter. The Pharisees brand Jesus as a sinner because he healed a man on the Sabbath. In receiving this grace, and then refusing to condemn Jesus, the man too is branded as a sinner! Such a fate awaits all of Jesus' disciples, as he will make clear later (15:18-25).

A fundamental issue is here demonstrated between Jesus and his opponents. Both are exponents of the law but each interprets it differently. The Jews had always understood the law in light of what Moses appears to teach, but Jesus interprets it in light of his coming as the Son of God. To understand the law in this way would take a fundamental rethink for men like these Pharisees, in the way that it did for Paul after he encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road.

They drove him out refers to expulsion from the synagogue and consequences were discussed in the comments made on vv.18-23. Yet the promises of God hold out hope for such as this man: <<*Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name's sake have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, so that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to sham*>> (Isaiah 66:5). The way this is done suggests an impulsive action rather than excommunication based on a formal procedure.

## II.c.ix.3 John 9:35-41 - Spiritual Blindness

Jesus meets up with the healed man, identifies himself as the Son of Man, to which the man's response is emphatic. He believed in Jesus and worshipped him. Jesus stated that he had come to restore the sight of the blind and to blind those who claim to have spiritual sight but do not. Some Pharisees overhear this and challenge Jesus, but they find that they stand self-condemned.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' <sup>36</sup> He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' <sup>38</sup> He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him.

## John 9:35-38

Jesus finds the one who has been thrown out, acting like the Good Shepherd he will soon claim to be. Here is the tenderness and mercy of God in action, but such love is never sentimental in this Gospel. When Jesus finds the man he confronts him with another of his testing questions: do you believe in the Son of Man? The

man had been blind and would not have seen Jesus before this moment and it seems that no one had told him about this new Rabbi, so how could he have believed in him before this had occurred: <<***But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?***>> (Romans 10:14). The man continues to be responsive to the revelation of who Jesus is. He confesses him as the Son of Man, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him, just as his other disciples would after he was raised from the dead: <<***Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him***>> (Matthew 28:9).

The word for Lord is Greek *kyrios* and can also mean ‘sir’, a respectful address. Likewise, the term for worshipped is *proskyneo*, which means to fall down and pay homage to either God or a human being. However, in the NT, both words are used exclusively with regard to someone divine and thus the man recognises Jesus as being more than just a prophet as he had earlier stated in v.17. It seems unlikely he truly knew who it was who was speaking to him.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’

#### John 9:39

I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind. Here, in a key definition, Jesus says his judgment both enlightens and blinds. He has not come for judgment in the sense of condemnation (3:17), but such condemnation does take place as he who is the light of the world is revealed. When the light shines, judgment takes place; however, salvation comes as well, for when the light of the world dawns hearts are revealed and the truth about individuals’ relationships with God is brought into the open. In the case of those who become blind: <<***And he said, ‘Go and say to this people: “Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.” Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed’***>> (Isaiah 6:9-10), and: <<***They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart***>> (Ephesians 4:18).

So that those who do not see may see. One of the signs of the Messiah’s ministry was to enable the blind to see: <<***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free***>> (Luke 4:18).

<sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.

## John 9:40-41

Surely we are not blind, are we? Here is revealed their self-perception as those who are spiritually illumined with the knowledge of God. The Pharisees are the ones who think they know, but they have a knowledge that does not recognise Jesus for who he really is. So Jesus responds with words of great grace, hard words, but words that can break through and lead them into the true light.

If you were blind means they had no knowledge at all about God's words or his laws, and no knowledge about whom Jesus is.

You would not have sin does not mean that they would be free of a sinful nature imputed from Adam, but that they would have no guilt for violating specific teachings or commands that they had received. Paul makes a similar argument in Romans 1:18-3:20, namely, that all have received some knowledge of God: *<<For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse>> (Romans 1:18-20), and: <<When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them>> (Romans 2:14-15).*

But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains. Since these men refused to even contemplate they may not know everything about God's ways or what the Scriptures truly tell them, their hearts will never be open to their error, they will not be able to repent, turn to Jesus and receive the forgiveness of God.

Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees at the conclusion of this story reveals their alienation from God more clearly, and it also says something about those who, like the blind man, do come to faith in Jesus. This story is an encouragement to stand up and bear witness, and it also illustrates the experience of everyone who becomes a true disciple. Every human being is in the condition of this man spiritually: born blind and in need of enlightenment. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ancient church saw in this story as a depiction of baptism, since baptism was known as enlightenment.