

That You May Continue to Believe...



AN EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Man Born Blind Meets the Light of the World John 9:1-41

It's a figure of speech we use all the time: **"Oh, now I see"** or **"You've really opened my eyes"** or **"It's so clear to me now"** or **"Once I was blind but now I see."** What we mean, of course, is **"Now, I understand."**

Almost every use of this particular metaphor goes back to the passage we are looking at this morning. Sometimes truth breaks in on us with such extraordinary clarity that it shocks us. Our lives are absolutely transformed by the new thing we have learned. Sometimes, of course, what we think is truth breaks in on us and though it seems crystal clear, we still manage to get everything wrong. When that happens, it can be pretty funny.

When I was in Bible College, I drove a 1964 Rambler. It was a pitiful car. I paid \$50 for it. It has no seat covers and it almost had no floorboard. My kids loved to ride in it because it was so scary. They could see the pavement through the floorboard when we were going down the road. Anyway, one afternoon I was

going to class after I got off work and I ran out of gas on the way to school. I called Beverly to come and get me and she agreed to do so even though she was baby-sitting 8 or 9 kids in our home at the time.

The car she drove was just about as bad as mine. It had a loose header cloth that hung down about a foot from the roof of the car. It rested on top of your head when you were riding in it. Anyway, a policeman pulled up behind me while I was waiting. He was very kind. He asked me what the problem was and I told him. I also told him that my wife was coming bringing me some gas. While we were waiting, he noticed that my license plate had expired and pulled out his book to write me a ticket. I pointed out that my inspection sticker was also expired and that he might as well write me up on that too.

Well just about that time, Beverly pulled up with a carload of kids. The officer looked back at the pitiful car she was driving and at the sagging header cloth resting on her and the kid's heads. Now, it was just providential that most of the kids in the car had red hair like Beverly's. He looked at me and then he looked at her and then the kids and then he looked at me and asked, **"Your wife?"** I nodded that yes, indeed, it was my wife and then he turned to me and said, **"Son, I'm not gonna write you a ticket. You already got more problems than you know."** He drove off shaking his head.

Of course sometimes people have bursts of insight, which are wrong, and they are not nearly so funny.

At the beginning of the Civil War one southern lady wrote in her journal that the Northern newspapers told vicious lies about the South.

The Northern papers say ...that we tie prisoners to a tree and bayonet them. In other words, we are savages. It ought to teach us not to credit what our papers say of them. It is so absurd ... We are absolutely treating their prisoners as well as our own men: ... I am going to the hospitals for the enemy's sick and wounded in order to see for myself.¹

At the end of the war, after she had learned about Andersonville Prison, she wrote:

God help us all if the Yankees ever find out about Andersonville.

One the truths that pervades John's Gospel is that it is possible to look truth right in the face and miss it. Now there is some of that in our passage this morning. Sometimes the truth can be all around you and you can still be completely oblivious to it. There is some of that in our passage as well. But in case we get bogged down in the passage this morning, I want to tell you up front what the truth was that confronted the people in our story. The Lord Jesus Himself had already revealed it in chapter 8. He said there:

^{ESV} **John 8:12**...Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

He even repeats the same thought in the chapter we are looking at this morning, chapter 9. There he says:

^{ESV} **John 9:5**...As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

The point of the story we're looking at this morning is that Jesus is indeed the light of the world and that believing in Him will save us from the blindness of our own sin. Try to keep that in mind as we look at the passage and I think it will help.

Now, as I've already said, in the preceding chapter Jesus had announced that He was the light of the world and it had made the Pharisees furious. They had asked Him point blank, **"Don't you realize we are children of Abraham?"** It was their way of saying, **"You don't think we are spiritually blind too do you?"** And He had answered them point blank, **"I think you are children of the devil. If you were children of Abraham, you would believe in me just as Abraham did."** It was His way of saying, **"Yes, you are blind as you can be."**

Because of that, they had taken up stones to kill Him, both for what He had said about Himself and especially for what He had said about them. Certainly, the argument between Jesus and the Pharisees must have concerned His disciples. I can imagine the tense conversation as they walked slowly out of the temple compound. However, as they walked along, they happened upon a man born blind. They had been trying to put it all together. They knew that spiritual blindness was sin. Jesus had said so many times. But now looking at the beggar, they were trying to understand something of the nature of physical blindness and its relationship to sin. We know that because one of the disciples asked Him straight-out about the blind beggar they had come across.

^{ESV} **John 9:1**...As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Now, I should say most commentators place this scene directly after was chased out of the temple. Some, however, place it two or three months later during the Feast of Dedication, which today is known as Hanukkah. But regardless of when it occurred chronologically, it certainly fits here thematically.

Now, in explicating this text, I want to talk about two separate things: (1) I want to talk about the view that the ancient Jews had about sin and suffering and (2) I want to talk about how we sometimes let bad theology creep into our relationships and attitudes toward others.

First, let's talk about how the ancient Jews viewed such suffering. In the first century, Jews connected misfortune and suffering with sin. There is a sense in which, of course, they were right. Misfortune and suffering exist in the world because of sin. Some situations, however, made it clear that such a view was not always right. Sometimes there is no direct connection between an individual's sin and an individual's circumstances. Sometimes things happen that are part and parcel of the imponderable wisdom of God. We know that is true from the case of this young man born blind.²

Now, what the disciples were trying to do what put two and two together. On the one hand, they were thinking sin causes misfortune. On the other hand, this man was *born* blind. How could he have sinned before he was even born? Now, what is really strange is that there were some rabbis that actually believed a child could commit certain sins in the womb that would lead to deformity, to sickness

or even to death. Some rabbis believed in the pre-existence of the soul and believed that such illness was connected to previous behavior, almost like the Hindu notion of *karma*.³ Still, others thought that such terrible things found their source in the sinful behavior of the parents.

Jesus does not concern Himself to address every possibility. He does not say, **“Well in this kind of case, this is what happened. Or in that kind of case such and such kind of behavior was the cause.”** What He does say is this, **“In this man’s case, his blindness is not his fault or his parent’s fault. In this man’s case, His blindness occurred so that God would be glorified.”**

Now, secondly I said I wanted to comment on how our bad theology sometimes creeps into our attitudes regarding the suffering of others. What I really want to do is read to you Calvin’s summary of the three mistakes Christians most often make in regard to other people’s suffering. I have contemporized them to make them easier to understand.

First, while *most men are* ready to *criticize* others with extreme bitterness, there are few *people* who apply to themselves, as they ought to do, the same severity. *For example*, if my brother meets with adversity, I *am quick to* acknowledge the God’s judgment *on him*; but if God chastises me with a heavier stroke, I *barely wince* at my *own* sins.

Our second error lies in *our* excessive severity; for no sooner is *a* man touched by the hand of God, than we conclude that *his situation* shows God’s hatred *toward him*. As a result, we turn *other people’s* small offenses into major crimes, and *wind up* doubting their salvation. On the contrary, by *justifying* our own actions, we *easily turn our own sinful mountains into molehills*.

Thirdly, we do wrong *when we hammer* all, without exception *because God has visited them with the cross* or with tribulation. *On the one hand* it is undoubtedly

true that all our distresses arise from sin; *on the other hand*, God afflicts his own people for *more than one reason*.⁴

Anyway, having said that let's look at the text.

^{ESV} **John 9:4**...We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Now Jesus is not saying that He and His disciples must work until His ascension and then quit. He is not arguing that they must get a certain amount of work in and then turn everything over to the work of the Holy Spirit. He is alluding rather to the fact, that the crucifixion is coming and in that day there will be no work. All will be darkness. But until that day until that very moment when darkness reigns in the earth, he and His disciples must keep on working.

^{ESV} **John 9:6**...Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Now, I must admit, I think that this is one of the most extraordinary scenes anywhere in the Bible. It is absolutely unexpected. It was so different from anything Jesus had ever done, that it makes you wonder why He did it. There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus could have just spoken the word and healed the blind man straightway. But instead He spat on the ground and bent down and made clay out of the soil and the spit. When He had made the clay, He stood up and applied the clay to the man's eyes.

Now, there is something about this scene that offends those of finer sensibilities. But that has always been the way of Christianity. It is a religion based upon blood and death. It speaks of sin and corruption and blood and redemption. It speaks of water and of wine and bread. It is common in all of its elements, all except for the person of Jesus. He is what makes these things holy. He sanctifies all these things. It is His blood that saves us. The water we use speaks of the cleansing He provided and the bread and the wine remind us of His death on our behalf.

Still, in spite of its inherent offensiveness, scholars have struggled to understand why our Savior spat on the ground and made clay to anoint the man's eyes. It may have been that Jesus was trying to explain His power as the Creator of all things. This forming something out of clay doubtlessly caused many Old Testament passages to spring to their minds. They would have thought of passages like:

^{NIV} **Genesis 2:7**...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

^{NIV} **Job 10:9**...Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?

Or even:

^{NIV} **Psalm 103:14**...for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Jesus may have been demonstrating His power as the Creator of all things. He may have been showing both His disciples and us that He could create this man

eyes out of the very dust that He had first used to create man. Listen to how Calvin puts it:

When people ask what is meant by the clay made of dust and spittle, some explain it to be a figure of Christ, with the dust denoting the his humanity, and the spittle, which came from his mouth, denoting His deity. For my part, I choose not allegorize, and am satisfied with this simple view, that since man was at first made of clay, Christ made use of clay, showing that he had the same power over the eyes which the Father had displayed in making the whole man.⁵

On the other hand, he may have been demonstrating His ability to restore spiritual light where the darkness of sin had snuffed it out. If that is the sense, then Jeremiah 18 may be especially helpful in understanding what Jesus was doing:

^{NIV} Jeremiah 18:2... "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

Restoration, renewal, recreation are all synonyms for something that we as Christians know something about. There is not a one of us that has not been delivered from the blindness of our own sin? And it was not a deliverance that we helped along. We were blind to our separation from God; we were blind to the seriousness of our own sin. But God reached down from heaven in kindness and regenerated us. He gave us new spiritual sight and new spiritual life. He remade us as a potter does a damaged pot. That is what was happening here. This man's eyes were being restored but even more than that he was being given spiritual eyes to see the truth. And what truth was that? It was the truth that Jesus is the light of the world.

One final thing, you ought to notice the repetition of the word Siloam. It came up in John 7, though indirectly. Here it comes up and is interpreted because of John's intention to show that this man is sent by the one who was sent from the Father. Now look at verse 7....

^{ESV} **John 9:7**...So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Now imagine the homecoming that this man's return must have caused. I can see this man now seeing for the first time trying to figure out which door was his. I can see him knocking on their door and I can see his aging parents answer the door knowing instantly by the smile on his face that he could see. I can see the years of guilt and all the baggage associated with his being blind believed lifted off their bent and stooping shoulders.

John tells us that he stirred up a quite a controversy even in his own neighborhood.

^{ESV} **John 9:8**...The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some said, "It is he."

Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." I'm sure the countenance of the man looked different. His beaming smile and his endless gazing at all things new must have changed his face. Still, I love his persistence in witnessing to the truth. The Greek verb tense emphasizes the repetitiveness of his answer, **"I am the man. I am the man. I am the man."**

Of course, his neighbors wanted to know how he had regained his sight. Verse 9 and 10 contain their question and his response.

^{ESV} **John 9:10**...So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

Now there are two things that ought to pop into your mind. First, the whole scene is reminiscent of the Elijah and Naaman the leper. Just as Elijah sent Naaman to wash, so Jesus sent the blind man to wash (2 Kings 5). Both actions required a measure of faith. Naaman balked and then finally did what he was told. The blind man never hesitated.

Secondly, I think it is extraordinary that the man's neighbors felt absolutely no compunction about taking him to the Pharisees and we are almost immediately compelled to ask, "**Why, why, would they do that?**" We know that people everywhere were afraid of the opinion of the Jewish leaders. We get that from verse like...

^{ESV} **John 7:13**...Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

Still, the real reason they took the man to the Jews is probably to be found in verse 14. Let's pick up some context first, however, by looking at 9:13.

^{ESV} **John 9:13**...They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Now what does that reference to the Sabbath remind you of? It ought to remind you of the man at the Pool of Bethesda. You remember there how John kept us in

suspense and didn't tell us that Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath until well in the story. It is the same thing here. Now what is really interesting is that the Jews considered Jesus action to be a violation of the law primarily because He kneaded the spit and the dirt together into mud but also because He healed a man, who was apparently in no danger of dying, on the Sabbath.⁶ One commentator puts it like this:

We are now informed that it was a Sabbath when Jesus 1) kneaded the mud and 2) opened the eyes of the blind man. *Just as we did* in chapter 5 (where Jesus had healed and given the command to carry the mat), *we have* here a double infraction of the Law. The only difference is that, this time, the patient has done nothing *wrong*. *Instead*, the man stands before the tribunal as a witness. The Pharisees hear his testimony in order to pass a judgment upon the activity of Jesus (viz., upon Jesus himself).

Healing on the Sabbath was permitted only when life was in danger. Since blindness is a chronic illness, Jesus should not have healed, in their view, on the Sabbath. Furthermore, Jesus kneaded the mud. This detail is given great emphasis by John (6.11.14.15). It was one of the 39 works forbidden on the Sabbath⁷. Finally, Jesus used matter, which was not ordinarily used during the week to anoint eyes. This was a further violation of the Sabbath. The Pharisees deduce, quite correctly from their point of view, that Jesus has not kept the Sabbath.⁸

Of course, even the Pharisees were divided over Jesus. Look at verse 16.

^{ESV} **John 9:16**...Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

I can imagine that the man who had been born blind reveled in the argument going on around him. He had heard them fight many times as he begged for alms but now he was watching them and he was watching them with his own perfectly good eyes.

One man shouted, **"This Jesus is a Sabbath breaker."**

Another man asked, **"How could such a sinner do these things?"**

Finally, they asked the man born blind his opinion, **"What do you say?"**

I love his answer. **"He is a prophet. No doubt about it."**

But the Pharisees hated his answer. So they wanted to talk to his parents. They refused to believe that what he said was true. They refused even to believe that the man had ever even been blind. So they called for his parents.

^{ESV} **John 9:18**...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 ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

Notice how deviously they question the truthfulness of the man's parents. The parents knew what they were doing and were terrified and they were torn on just how to answer. If they said yes they would make the Pharisees mad; if they said no it would seem like they were ungrateful to Jesus. So they tried to steer a middle course.

^{ESV} **John 9:22...**(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So, the Pharisees turned on the man who had been blind all over again.

^{ESV} **John 9:24...**So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner."

Now, I don't want you to misunderstand the nature of their command to the man born **blind**. **They weren't saying**, "Praise God for what He has done in your life?" They weren't even saying, "**Praise God but don't praise Jesus?**" I think D.A. Carson is right. They were saying, "**Honor God. Own up to the truth. Admit that the man is a sinner.**"

Now what is remarkable about the irony of this passage is that he did exactly what they asked. He honored God by his response. On the other hand they did exactly the opposite of what they asked him to do. They wanted him to admit the truth, which he did. They, on the other hand, rejected the truth, which was especially obvious to the man who had been born blind.

You can see a conflict was coming.

^{ESV} **John 9:25**...He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ 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?"

From this point on the gloves were off. He began to mock them. He was saying, **"I've gone over it and over it again but you did not listen. You don't intend to listen, so why do you want to hear it again? You don't have any desire to become one of His disciples like I have, do you? No, of course, I can see that you don't."**

I think it interesting that the man was already identifying himself with Jesus. A moment ago, he had considered Jesus a prophet; now, he considered Him a prophet but actually considered Him to be someone worthy of following. It is something the Pharisees picked right up on but they did so with great sarcasm.

^{ESV} **John 9:28**...And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

They deemed themselves to be Moses' disciples. They liked the law or at least they liked the law as they interpreted it. They did not like Jesus. He always kept them off balanced. He pointed out their failures and they could not forgive Him for that. And by now the man born blind was beginning to see their extraordinary spiritual blindness. He was also getting tired of their constant attacks on Jesus. He now not only felt the need to point out their blindness but to

speak up for the wonderful person, a person he had not yet seen, Who had healed his blindness. But he was about to get himself in deep trouble.

^{ESV} **John 9:30**...The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

I want you to see the similarity between how this man answered the Pharisees and how Jesus had answered Nicodemus. Jesus had said to Nicodemus, **"Can it be that you are Israel's teacher and yet still do not know this stuff?"** The man born blind says to the Pharisees, **"Now isn't that remarkable, He gave me sight and you don't even know where He is from."**

There is also one other parallel between Jesus and the man born blind. Do you remember way back in John 3, where Jesus more or less answered Nicodemus sarcastically by repeating to him his own answer? Nicodemus had been saying, **"Teacher we know you are from God"** and Jesus had asked him a question, which he could not answer. Finally, Jesus said to Nicodemus, **"Let me tell you what we know because we know what we have seen."**

Do you remember how I made a big deal out of that? Well the man born blind does exactly the same thing here. The Pharisees say to the man born blind, **"We know this man is a sinner"** and **"We know God spoke to Moses but we do not know where this man is from."** Well here the man born blind responds, **"So you don't know here He is from huh. Here's what we know. We know that from the beginning of time no one has ever healed a man born blind except this**

man. And we know that God does not listen to sinners but to the godly man, that's what we know."

But even beyond that, I want you to see once more the progression of this man's thinking. First, it was, **"He's a prophet."** Then it was, **"He is someone worth following."** Here it's, **"He's from God, no doubt about it."**

As far as the Pharisees were concerned, this last bit of insight on the part of the man born blind was the final insult.

^{ESV} **John 9:34**...They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.⁹

There are two things to note here. First, they clearly thought the man's blindness was the result of his own sin. Secondly, the text leads us to the following question, **"Threw him out of what?"** The answer is found in the preceding text and context. Verse 22, is the last place anyone is mentioned as being cast out and that is a reference to the synagogue.¹⁰

^{ESV} **John 9:22**...(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)

Now you will remember that I have been arguing straight along that the Gospel of John was written to encourage those first century Jews who were waffling in their faith and were thinking about going back to the synagogue. You can see how then this chapter is pivotal to that whole argument. In fact, I think this chapter is the climax of the first half of the book and is the application that John

has been moving toward in the first eight chapters. I think John's point is this, **"Stick with Jesus, He is greater than the ceremonial law. He is greater than Jacob. He is greater than the temple. He is greater than Elijah and the prophets. He is greater than Moses and gives true bread and true drink from heaven. He is greater than Abraham. He is certainly greater than the synagogue."**

Of course, there are those that argue that it could not have possibly meant that and that the whole passage is anachronistic. That is some argue that John took the issues of his day and wrote them back into the story of Jesus¹¹. They argue that way because there is no formal expulsion of Christians from the Synagogue until the Council of Jamnia in 85 AD.¹² Still others think the way I do.

Listen to Herman Ridderbos:

I do not agree, therefore, that the fear of expulsion of the parents of the man born blind was something inconceivable during Jesus' life and that the whole idea of 9:22 could only have happened until some sixty or seventy years later. The Evangelist himself, by using the word "already," clearly indicates the advanced stage that hostility against Jesus and his followers had reached. Such an extreme step was completely consistent with what he has already said about the quickly advancing conflict. Is it so strange that "the Jews," who planned to kill Jesus and looked for ways to arrest him, at the same time tried to intimidate followers who openly acknowledged him as the Messiah by threatening them with expulsion?¹³

The point I want you to get is that they were cutting him off from their fellowship. They were casting him out. And the manner in which they were casting him out was particularly cruel. They alluded back to his blindness. They pointed out that his blindness was the result of his extraordinary sinfulness. They accused him of being steeped in blindness. They were hinting that it served

him right to miss the truth. There is, of course, the one extraordinarily ironic part of their question that they should have stayed to have answered. They had asked, "...and are you teaching us?"

If they had stayed just a few more minutes he could have taught them something really important. He could have taught the only appropriate way to respond to Jesus. Look at verse 35.

It was a voice he must have recognized immediately. He had been cast out and he was alone. But he could still see. And then, as I said, there was this voice and now there was face attached to it. It asked a simple question. There was no sarcasm or hatefulness. There was only the face and the gentle voice attached to it.

^{ESV} **John 9:35**...Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man who had been born blind answered as graciously as he had been asked.

^{ESV} **John 9:36**...He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

I love Jesus' answer.

^{ESV} **John 9:37**...Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."

Do you get His answer? **“You’ve seen Me with the eyes of your heart and now you are looking at Me with your own two good eyes, eyes I gave you. You know Me, don’t you?”**

^{ESV} **John 9:38**...He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

It is the final glory of the man’s witness. I have often wondered how people that doubt the deity of Jesus handle this passage. It is impossible to say that the man worshipped the Father here. The reference or nearest antecedent is clearly Jesus. And his act, is the final step in the progression of the man’s sight.¹⁴ To him Jesus had gone from being a prophet, to someone worth following, to an emissary from God, to God Himself.

And so this morning it is the same for us.

We too were blind to our sin. We were blind to our alienation before God. But Jesus broke through all that. He not only showed us that we were enemies but He also showed us that He had reconciled us to God. He took our sin upon Himself and made peace between God and us. His blood covered our sin.

And now we can see it so clearly. It is like we were blind but now we see. That is why we worship Him. That is why we long to come Sunday after Sunday and commune with Him. We see Him there in the wine and the bread. We see Him in the water. We see Him in the redeemed faces of those with whom we worship. We hear Him in the hymns and in the prayers and in Holy Scripture and even in the miry clay of a poorly crafted Sunday School lesson.

That is why we worship and that is why, Brothers and Sisters, I can give you a word from the Lord this morning. If you have put your hope in Him, if you are trusting Him as the author and finisher of your faith, it is well with your soul. He has removed the veil of sin covering your eyes. He has removed the veil of sin covering your heart. He has lifted you out of the miry clay and set your feet upon a solid foundation.

Of course, if you have not trusted Christ it is altogether a different matter. Listen to what Jesus says in conclusion.

^{ESV} **John 9:39**... Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Do you see why John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, includes this verse? What he is trying to do is to encourage on more time those waffling first century Jewish believers to stick with Jesus.¹⁵ What he is trying to do is to get them to see the enormity of the sin associated with forsaking Jesus and we know, of course, that we must stay where we are. We know what we know; we know that once we were blind but now we see and it is because Jesus has saved us from the blindness of our sin.

¹ Mary Chestnut, *A Diary From Dixie*, (New York: Gramercy Book, 1997), 95.

² C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Notes and Commentary on the Greek Text*, (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 294-5. He writes: "It is assumed that sin, by whomsoever committed, was the cause of the blindness. This was the common belief in Judaism; see e.g. *Shabbath* 55 a: There is no death without sin (proved by Ezek. 18.20) and no punishment (i.e. sufferings) without guilt (proved by Ps. 89.33). When a man has been blind from birth, the sin must be sought either in the man's parents, or in his own ante-natal existence. That the sins of

parents could lead to physical defects in their children is attested in passages cited in S.B. II, 529, and ante-natal sin was regarded as possible; see the interpretation of Gen. 25.22 in *Gen R.* 63.6; also *Song of Songs R* 1.41 (when a pregnant woman worships in a heathen temple the fetus also commits idolatry)."

³ B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954) , 144.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. (Sage Digital CDROM) chap. 9, 326. I have contemporized Calvin's words trying very hard to keep the sense. The reader may want to examine the original quote to see if I have erred.

⁵ Ibid. Same story on contemporizing` the text.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 332. Bultmann notes in footnote 3 that the Pharisees would have viewed the "kneeding" of mud as an eye salve or poultice as a violation of the Sabbath.

See also: Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel V.2* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942), 407.

⁷ See Strass-Billerbeck II, 488, ad Jn 7, 23. (German required.)

⁸ Pancaro, Severino, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*. (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 19-20.

⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John V.29* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 375. Brown argues against formal excommunication and insists that they only removed him from their immediate presence which to me seems to be the exact opposite of what is being argued. Still Brown is should never be quickly dismissed.

¹⁰ Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*. (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 245-7. Pancaro quotes K.L. Carroll BJRYL 40 (1957-58) extensively as given below...

Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.), Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai fled from the city to the Roman camp and obtained permission from the Roman commander to settle in Jamnia and establish a school there. This event was to have an incalculable influence on the future of Judaism. From the schools at Jamnia, during the years, which followed the destruction of Jerusalem, Judaism was to receive its reorganization and consolidation. It was here that the long strife between the opposed schools of Shammai and Hillel was brought to an end in favour of the latter and the possibility of schism eliminated; it was here that the doctors of the Law formed themselves into a Council, the Great Bet Din, for which Gamaliel II, the successor of Rabban Johanan, endeavoured to obtain recognition and submission to its authority from all Jews. The contemporaries of Gamaliel II and their immediate disciples (the period extends from 80 to 140 A.D., approximately) became the fundamental authorities of what may be called "normative" Judaism.

It was under Gamaliel II that Simeon ha-Pakuli is said to have arranged the Eighteen Benedictions, the daily recitation of which Gamaliel made obligatory for every man.¹⁸¹ The prayer for the extirpation of heretics, the Birkat ha-Minim, was formulated by Simeon the Little, another disciple of Gamaliel II, and was introduced into the Shemoneh Esreh by order of Gamaliel. It thus became part of the liturgy of the Synagogue around 90 A.D. (shortly before the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel).

The Twelfth Benediction (Birkat ha-Minim), in its oldest Palestinian form, reads: "For apostates may there be no hope, and may the Nazarenes (הנצריִם) and the Minim (המיניִם) perish". The "Nazarenes" are obviously Christians (they had not yet become a heretical Christian sect), but a number of authors hold that the word did not belong to the original "blessing". The question as to whom the Birkat is directed against therefore hinges on the meaning of the term "Minim". Are they Christians or Jewish Gnostics? If they are Christians, are they Jewish-Christians or Gentile-Christians?

Much ink has flown in an attempt to answer these questions, and unanimity has not been reached. What may be considered almost certain is that the term "Minim" in the oldest Rabbinical texts designates heretical *Jews*. It is only later (from 180-200 onwards) that it became a designation for the followers of other "creeds" and Christians in particular.' Even Hirschberg, who holds that "the term Minim refers to Paul's adherents *par excellence*, does not deny that "the Talmudic literature ... evinces greater interest in those of Jewish origin".' As for the other question (whether the Minim are Jewish-Christians or Jewish Gnostics), most authors would agree that the term "Minim" designates, primarily, Jewish-Christians, even if it may designate Jewish heretics more generally.

The Birkat ha-Minim was a result of the consolidation of Judaism and the need felt to unify and centralize, the need for a "normative" Judaism. It is interesting to note, "no Talmudic report dealing with the Minim can be traced to any date prior to the last decade of that (i.e., the first) century. But in this decade they make a rather sudden appearance in many religious controversies recorded by Talmudic literature". Precisely up to this period Jewish-Christians represented a conventicle within the Synagogue, rather than a sect. It is a known fact that Jewish-Christians took active part in the prayers and rites of the Synagogue during the decades, which followed Christ's death. The Birkat ha-Minim was introduced into the liturgy of the Synagogue in order to detect and expose "false" Jews. The prayer had to be recited aloud and attention was paid to its distinct recitation.

What concrete effect the introduction of the Twelfth Benediction had on driving Jewish-Christians out of the Synagogue is unknown, but it is clear that, with the end of the Jewish war (132-135 A.D.), the Church had already dissociated itself from Judaism. From this time on the Rabbinic invectives against Christians subside an obvious result of the fact that Christianity, in the eyes of Judaism, was no longer a form of heretical Judaism. The Church had become the Church of the Gentiles and Christianity a totally different religion!

When all these factors are considered, it appears that the strong opposition against the Minim at the end of the first century coincides with the period in which Judaism was closing its ranks and

Jewish-Christians had still not dissociated themselves from Judaism. The Birkat ha-Minim was no doubt primarily directed against Jewish-Christians and must have contributed to drive them out of the Synagogue, which was exactly its main objective. Its introduction into the liturgy of the Synagogue makes sense only if those against whom it was aimed still took part in the liturgy.

¹¹ W. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel*, (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 144-145. That seems to be the position of Nicol, who argues that the author of John looked at his own present-day theological situation and read it back into the historical accounts of Jesus and the Jews. The following are his thoughts. I think he is quite wrong. What he seems to be arguing of is revisionism; what I am arguing for is seed and fruition.

Therefore, another explanation must be sought, and it may be found in the development of Jewish history after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. As a result of the war, all of the leading groups amongst the Jews lost their influence, except for the Pharisees who organized themselves in Jamnia for the study of the Torah. The Temple, which had been the center of Judaism, was destroyed, and the Pharisees made the Torah the new center. They decided about matters on which there was difference among Jews and so created more conformity, e.g., the teachings of the Sadducees were rejected. Previous to this, the Jewish Christians were still basically accepted as Jews, e.g., in 58 A.D. when Paul came to Jerusalem (Acts 21: 18ff.), it was still customary for Jewish Christians to offer sacrifice in the Temple. Paul could attempt to convert Jews in every city. But naturally this would become more and more difficult as a result of the new conformity. During the first decade after the war, the attitude of the Pharisees towards Jewish Christians was still mild under leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. In 80, however, he was succeeded by the authoritarian Gamaliel II who convinced the other rabbis that a curse against the *minim* (heretical Jews, especially Christians) had to be inserted into the *Schemone Es're*, recited by the Jews as the chief prayer in the synagogues. This was the final break between the Church and Judaism. The exact date is unknown but it must have been between 85 and 90. All the earlier measures taken against Christians by Jews were *ad hoc* decisions; this was the first official decision by the central authorities, which corresponds to Jn. 9:22. It is true that expulsion is not explicitly mentioned in connection with the curse of the *minim*, but it would have been the practical result.

Gamaliel II made his decisions known to all the synagogues of the Diaspora by means of official letters. Also in John's town Jews interested in Christianity would have been forced to sever their ties either with the Church or with the synagogue. The synagogue would have attempted to win back its former members. The Jews developed missionary power so that, e.g., Ignatius and the letter of Barnabas had to warn the Christians against the Jews in the second century. The *Dialogue* of Justin also shows how the Christians had to answer hostile Jewish objections against the Messiahship of Jesus. A number of those mentioned by Justin are similar to those of the Jews in John. The reaction of the author of Revelation on the hostility of the Jews was that he called them "the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

In such a situation John writes his Gospel. In many respects it seems that the present circumstances in John's town are reflected by his way of describing the confrontation between Jesus and the Jews. Of course, he is not explicitly writing about the present but about history. But as one of the essential principles of this theology was that he saw the present Christ in the historical Jesus, so he saw the present conflict already reflected in the historical one. In his theology the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ living in the Church are identical, and,

therefore, he is concerned about the essential unity of the persecution of Jesus and of the Church. He writes history as a two-level drama, at the same time alluding to the present. He also had a firm factual basis for doing this. For instance, it holds true for both the present and the time of Jesus' life that the Jews are hostile and that their influential leaders are the Pharisees.

¹² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 369-372. Though Carson does not approve my understanding of the purpose of the book, he nevertheless provides an excellent discussion on synagogue expulsion.

¹³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 343.

¹⁴ Carson, 377. He writes: "The NIV reports that *he worshipped him*: the Greek verb *proskyneo* means to prostrate oneself before, 'to do obeisance to', and frequently occurs in contexts where there is no notion of worship or adoration. The verb takes on the force of o worship' when the person before whom one prostrates oneself is God. It is not clear that the healed man is yet ready to address Jesus as Thomas did after the resurrection, 'My Lord and my God' (20:28). It is likely that the healed man is offering obeisance to Jesus as the redeemer from God, the revealer of God. That is already a great step forward from his earlier references to Jesus (vv 11, 17, 33) But the Evangelist, who knows that the Chnstological confessions in his Gospel will climax with 20:28 (*cf.* 1:1, 18), doubtless understands that the healed man is worshipping' better than he knew."

¹⁵ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-1954), vol. 2, 96. Hendriksen quotes Calvin (9:34-41) here and it is lovely. "We have known the same thing by experience in our own time; for when Dr Martin Luther, and other persons of the same class, were beginning to reprove the grosser abuses of the Pope, they scarcely had the slightest relish for pure Christianity; but after that the Pope had thundered against them, and *cast them out* of the Roman synagogue by terrific bulls, Christ stretched out his hand, and made himself fully known to them. So there is nothing better for us than to be at a very great distance from the enemies of the Gospel, that Christ may approach nearer to us."