

### Exegesis

**Vs. 13-14** – Jesus just claimed to be *the* Light of the world, and how do the Pharisees respond? By trying to hit him with a technicality, a technicality, we'll see shortly, is in itself untenable.<sup>1</sup> They said because Jesus supposedly "bears record of himself [alone]," they cannot accept his claims as credible. They wanted additional testimonies that would corroborate his statements. But the astute reader will immediately see how John has leaden this moment with irony. In chapter 5, Jesus himself not only brought up this very legal standard before, but he has also provided more than sufficient witnesses—three to be exact—who substantiated his teaching (cf. 5:30-37).<sup>2</sup>

But rather than repeat himself, Jesus goes for yet another witness: his origin. After reaffirming the truthfulness of his statements, Jesus then responds by saying, "for I know whence I came, and whither I go..." Admittedly, this wouldn't have persuaded them. They did not know Jesus' origins (cf. 6:42); he even points out this fact when he says, you "cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go." As Keener rightly points out, "How can they suppose they know enough to accuse him when they do not even understand where he is truly from?"<sup>3</sup> But, even if they understood his words, they would've perceived them to be so fanciful they wouldn't have believed him. They might even think him to be so blasphemous that Jesus deserved to die.

Yet the reality is that our Lord did come from Heaven; this alone should've provided all the endorsement he needed (cf. 16:28).<sup>4</sup> Nowhere in Scripture do we see angels being asked for a list of references. When Moses spoke to the burning bush, he didn't look for another speaking fiery shrub to corroborate what the first plant said. There was One greater than angels standing in the Pharisees' midst. Unlike Moses, God was literally speaking to them in the form of a man and through some desert fern. His word verifies itself. Who would be so bold to demand that God show his work (cf. Psa. 19:1)?

Morris quotes from C. J. Wright's book, *Jesus: the Revelation of God*, illustrating the self-disclosing nature of Jesus Christ:

"There are types of so-called religious apologetic, which distrusting the intrinsic claims of religion itself, seek to put in its place 'external evidences' and 'institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Morris (1995), p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> As Carson (1991), p. 340, a fourth witness, the Holy Spirit, will be called to testify on Jesus' behalf (cf. 14-16).

<sup>3</sup> Keener (2012), 1:740.

<sup>4</sup> Carson (1991), p. 339.

safeguards.' How can light convince us that it is light except by what it does for us? We do not demonstrate that light is light by treatises, or by analysis of its constituent rays. It is only light to us when it illuminates and quickens us...Anyone can, to his own satisfaction, confute the claim which Beauty makes, by saying, I do not see it; or the claim inherent in Goodness, by saying, I do not hear it; or the self-evidencing nature of Truth, by saying, I do not know it. But man does not create Goodness, or Truth, or Beauty; and to say that he cannot see them is to condemn himself not them."<sup>5</sup>

**Vs. 15-16** – Moving from the defendant's chair to the judge's seat, Jesus now puts the religious leaders on trial. And he begins by leveling the accusation that they “judge after the flesh,” whereas Jesus says that he judges “no man.” Now, this can be taken one of two ways: either Jesus was making a definitive statement (i.e., “I never judge”), or it was a comparative statement (i.e., “unlike my own, your judgment is faulty”). Considering his words elsewhere, it is clear that Jesus was implying the latter (cf. 5:22, 27, 30; 7:24). Thus, we ought to understand the text to say, you “judge after the flesh; [but] I judge no man [after the flesh].” Indeed, Jesus was far too unbiased in his assessment of others to be counted alongside the likes of the Pharisees (cf. 8:11; Mk. 2:16; Lk. 7:39; 15:2).<sup>6</sup> And while it is true that Jesus did not come, initially, to condemn the world (cf. 3:17), he will, eventually, pass judgment (cf. Ja. 5:9; Rev. 19:11). And when that day comes, the Lord will not adjudicate matters using a humanly standard or an earthly perspective. His rule of law will be far better.

From a cultural context, it's interesting to note that Jesus' words would've likely resonated with one of the festivals that followed the Feast of Tabernacles, possibly Yom Kippur. Commonly known as the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur was when many Jewish teachers thought God rendered a verdict on the prior year. If so, Jesus spoke about judgment when such a topic would've been at the forefront of his listeners' thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

**Vs. 17-19** – Jesus moves to provide additional witnesses. The irony here is that rather than use the O.T., the Lord uses the Jew's own judicial practices against them. This is what he means by saying “*your* law” instead of “*the* law.” He's making a distinction between the procedures listed in the Torah and whatever legal code (i.e., the Talmud) they were using at this time. As is commonly known, the Jews added so many things to the law that it often rendered its original intent ineffective.<sup>8</sup> But, irony of ironies, even their own laws supported Jesus' case, as, according to it, “the testimony of two men is true.” It seems Jesus was as much an expert in the

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<sup>5</sup> Morris (1995), p. 390.

<sup>6</sup> Carson (1991), p. 340.

<sup>7</sup> Keener (2012), 1:741.

<sup>8</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 256.

laws of men as he was in the Law of God. And so, Jesus counts himself as one of those two witnesses and then counts God “the Father” as the second. He, too, can use legal technicalities (cf. vs. 13-14). As the Lord points out, who better to be called to the stands than the very one who “sent” Jesus? Once again, however, Jesus' words wouldn't have swayed the Pharisees. Depending on the case, if the judge knew a witness personally, that person wouldn't be allowed to testify.<sup>9</sup> And, like today, the testimony of a family member isn't as strong as that of an unbiased witness; that is unless your “Father” is God Himself!

Regardless, this must've piqued their interests because they responded by saying, “Where is your father?” They wanted Jesus to call his own Father to the stands.<sup>10</sup> This statement further solidifies the Pharisees' ignorance. They were still thinking of Jesus as the son of some earthly father. But considering Jesus' true parentage, “the Father” was already present and accounted for because there is no place where God *isn't* nearby.

Interestingly, Phillip—who understood that Jesus was the Son of God—will later explicitly ask to be shown “the Father.” And, in response, rather than show the disciples some vision, Jesus points to himself and says, essentially, “here He is” (cf. 14:8-11). Both Phillip's and the Pharisees' questions revealed their ignorance, but the Pharisees didn't even know that Jesus was the Son of God. And so, Jesus flatly points out their unawareness of things of God when he says, “You neither know me nor my Father.” This statement is similar to what we mean today when we say, “like father, like son.”<sup>11</sup> The coincidences—be it a physical characteristic or a personality trait—between a parent and child are so numerous that anyone who knows both can make the connection easily. Failure to make such a link likely occurs when a person does not know both parties. After all, it's hard to say that someone is just like their father if they have never personally known the child's father. Hence, Jesus says, if you really knew me, you would've “known my Father also.” Jesus bears all—not just some—of the traits of his Father. How could they not have recognized him? Either Jesus doesn't look and act like God; or, the Jews don't know God as well as they claim to.

**Vs. 20** – John tells us that Jesus spoke these words “in the treasury, as he taught in the temple...” and it is unclear why he interrupts the discourse at this point. There is no change of scene, and the conversation that follows plainly connects to what has proceeded it. So, what is the purpose of giving us such a locale? Did John want to play off Jesus' words in some way? If so, considering that the temple treasury was adjacent to the Court of Women, is it possible

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson (2015), p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> Morris (1995), p. 393, thinks the Pharisees are mocking Jesus. In the East, questioning a man's parentage was equivalent to insulting a person's honor.

<sup>11</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 257.

Jesus meant for his teaching to be heard by both sexes?<sup>12</sup> Was John trying to give evidence that he was really there?<sup>13</sup> Only an eyewitness would know such a specific detail. Perhaps John's remarks are meant to further emphasize that "no man laid hands on him...", which is to say, they wanted to, but, for some reason, didn't.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Jesus taught in the Temple publicly where all could hear him; yet, even though everyone listened to him, no one so much as laid a finger on him.<sup>15</sup> This was not because there wasn't a desire to kill Jesus; there very clearly was (cf. 7:1, 25). Instead, John says it was because "his hour was not yet come."

John's point is that the religious leaders had motive and ample opportunity to kill Jesus. And, considering the number of times he was surrounded by the very ones who wanted to kill him, it's rather remarkable that it took over three years for the Jews to actually go through with Jesus' murder. One might even wonder, "Why did it take them so long?" John provides the answer: no one takes Jesus' life; it is his alone to give. His "hour" would come when he said it was time for it to come. And the fantastic thing about the Gospels isn't that Jesus gave his life; that, in and of itself, is noteworthy. The truly astonishing thing about the crucifixion is that he went without compulsion or coercion. He gave his life *freely* (cf. 10:18).

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<sup>12</sup> Keener (2012), 1:742.

<sup>13</sup> Morris (1995), p. 394.

<sup>14</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Carson (1991), p. 341.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 4

Text: John 8:13-20

In this passage, the Pharisees try to get Jesus on a technicality. But, as we'll see, the Lord is as much an expert on the laws of men as he is on the Law of God. And try as they might, no religious intellectual ever get the better of him. But what surfaces in this passage is the reality that knowing Jesus is knowing God. And any who fail to recognize who Jesus is has revealed that they really don't know God either. What a harsh criticism of those supposed to know God the best.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: