

The Reaction of the Pharisees to the Healing of the Blind Man

John 9:13-23

John 9:13-23 - *"They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."*

¹⁶ *Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.*

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

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

²⁰ *His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself."*

²² *His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

Background Notes

The healing of the blind man in John 9 is the sixth of the seven "Sign Miracles" in the Gospel of John. Why did John include these seven specific "Sign Miracles"?

John 20:30-31 says, *"...Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."*

These verses tell us that the seven Sign Miracles in John's Gospel were **specifically selected to prove the deity of Jesus Christ** - so you can believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God, and have life in His name. Certainly the healing of a man who was blind from birth would verify the Lord's claim that He was the Son of God – that He was the Messiah.

When the healed man was brought before the Pharisees and they were told about the miracle, they had different reactions. (Remember - the Pharisees were a rigidly religious group within Judaism at that time.) Some of these religious leaders found fault with Jesus - they alleged that He had broken the Sabbath Law! Because the Lord took some clay, made it into mud and put it on the man's eyes, they claimed that He had "worked" instead of resting on the Sabbath. Making clay and healing the man was "work" – so Jesus had broken the laws about not working on the Sabbath!

By the way, over the years the Jewish religious leaders had manufactured many stringent rules about what constituted "work." These rules governed what a person was allowed to do – **or not do** - on the Sabbath. So it seems that the Lord

wanted to force the issue by **purposely** healing on the Sabbath on a number of occasions. He wanted to demonstrate the **true** meaning of God's Sabbath Law.

"Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." The Law God gave through Moses did not say that healing a person on the Sabbath was "work." In fact, most of the Pharisees' Sabbath laws that defined "work" were entirely man-made.

"Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?'" Nicodemus may have been one of the Pharisees in that category. Do you remember what Nicodemus said when he came at night to visit Jesus? John 3:2: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Notice that Nicodemus used the plural word - "signs." In John 3 Nicodemus said, *"no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* Nicodemus said "these signs," and the plural word is used again here in verse 16: *"Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?'"* The Pharisees were aware of the many miracles that Jesus was doing. It could not be denied that the Lord had supernatural power, so they were asking, "Is it possible that a mere human would be able to do these miracles?"

By the way, Joseph of Arimathea (the rich man in whose tomb the Lord was buried) may have been in this category as well. Like Nicodemus, he was a Jewish leader, a member of the Sanhedrin.

Other Pharisees denied that a miracle had taken place, and they wanted further proof. *"...the Jews did not believe.... that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight" (v18).* So there was division within the Pharisees.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. People are divided when confronted with the miracles of Christ.

Once again, verse 16: *"Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them."* The Pharisees were divided because of the miracles of Christ. Some completely denied them. No matter how much evidence was presented, they refused to believe. Others admitted the miracles, but didn't believe. And some of them, like Nicodemus, became believers.

It's still true today. People are divided when they're confronted with the miracles of Christ. A few years ago I was involved in a religious discussion with a number of university students who were not Christians. They were all more or less united in their opinion that Jesus was a "good man," but when the subject of His miracles came up, the group was instantly divided. Some minds were closed - they refused to believe in the miracles of Christ, no matter what was presented as evidence. Others were more open to the possibility that Jesus did miracles. Those students were the ones with whom I was able to talk further about the claims of Christ.

People are divided when confronted with the miracles of Christ because the miracles focus attention on the claim of the Lord Jesus that He is God. The miracles verify His claim to deity! Jesus **had** to be **more** than just a good man if He did the miracles.

So if you're in a conversation with unbelievers and you want to steer the conversation around to the question of the deity of Jesus Christ, mention His miracles. You will find widely differing opinions, reflecting different levels of openness to the truth of the deity of Christ. People are divided when confronted with the miracles of Christ.

2. Religious threats carry enormous power.

When the Pharisees asked the parents of the healed man to explain what had happened, they said, *"We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself"* (v20-21). So the parents "tossed the ball back into their son's court." Why did they do that? Verse 22 explains it: *"His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue."*

The healed man's parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jews! Why? The vindictive Jewish leaders had already agreed that if anyone confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, that person would be "put out" of the synagogue. In other words, that person would be excommunicated!

Thus, the man's parents felt threatened. They realized they'd better **not** tell the truth, but only say what the Pharisees wanted to hear, or they would be kicked out of the synagogue. The parents were afraid. In that day, being put out of the synagogue would negatively affect their social status, their reputations, and might even affect their livelihood! Religious threats carry enormous power.

The same situation occurs today. For example, if an Orthodox Jew becomes a Christian today, he or she is cut off from family, from friends, and from social and religious circles.

One of my students, a Jewish girl who became a believer in Jesus, told me that when she was considering becoming a Christian, her father threatened that he would put out of his house. He said he would disown her if she became a Christian! For her, becoming a Christian was not an easy decision - but she made the decision to trust in Jesus as her Savior and Messiah. And sadly, her father did disown her, and she was estranged from her family. Religious threats can carry enormous power.

Practical Applications

1. You don't have to understand the "mechanics" of your salvation to be saved.

There's a spiritual picture of salvation in the miracle of the healing of the blind man. Before we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior, we were spiritually blind. We were born that way! But when we became Christians, a miracle took place - we received spiritual sight! There was a change! We were born again! We now have new life! We were blind - but now we can see! *"...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).

Question: Do you have to understand all the theological "mechanics" of your salvation to be saved? Answer: No! Look at verse 15: *"Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."* In other words, he said "I don't know how it worked, but here's what happened: He

put clay on my eyes, I washed it off, and now I can see!” He didn’t know all that was involved in receiving his sight - but *he didn’t have to know how it happened in order to see!*

I think there’s the spiritual lesson here. We don’t have to understand all the “theological mechanics” of our salvation in order to be saved. All we have to know is that we are sinners who need salvation and believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners. All we have to do is exercise faith in Christ as our personal Savior, and that brings salvation. It’s a miracle! We are given new life - and we don’t have to understand **how** it happens!

To illustrate: You don’t have to understand electricity for it to work for you. You flip a switch and the light goes on. In the same way, you don’t have to understand all the theological details of your salvation to be saved. Some of you may have been worried about whether you are saved or not because you don’t understand exactly how it all works. Well, remember - you don’t have to understand all the “mechanics” of your salvation to be saved!

2. Let’s not measure spirituality by man-made standards.

The Pharisees were convinced that Jesus Christ was not from God because he “didn’t observe the Sabbath.” But the Lord Jesus refused to be bound by **their man-made rules** for the Sabbath. God’s Law didn’t say that making mud and healing a person on the Sabbath was sin. The Bible never said anything like that! These religious leaders were applying their **incorrect and distorted man-made standards**.

There are modern-day Pharisees in our churches. They are self-righteous people who measure a person’s spirituality by **their own** manufactured, self-made standards. For modern-day Pharisees, the translation of the Bible you choose to read becomes a negative measure of your spirituality, if it differs from their own self-approved translation. The kind of clothes you wear becomes a measure of your spirituality. The kind of Christian music you enjoy becomes a measure of your spirituality. Whether or not you use “thee” and “thou” in your prayers can become a measure of your spirituality. Even the way you pronounce certain biblical words may be a measure of your spirituality!

Let’s be very careful to measure spirituality by God’s standards, **not** by man-made standards!