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John 8:12-58 -- Controversy About Paternity

This section of John continues on with the questioning regarding Jesus' identity that had begun in chapter seven, only now He begins to testify concerning Himself. There are many sub-points which He makes, but the general flow of the argument seems to return to a comparison Jesus makes between Himself and the Pharisees regarding their "roots", or their origin. As often was the case in their encounters with Him, they did not quite understand where He was leading them, but eventually He makes some very strong confrontational statements to them, as well as some very clear claims concerning Himself.

Notes:

Vs. 12 - *I am the light of the world* -- As we saw, this verse, as a whole, was a reference to a Messianic prophecy from Isa. 9:1-7, establishing a link between Galilee and the Messiah which the Pharisees and common people had overlooked (Jn. 7:41,52). This particular phrase would have drawn the attention of these hyper-students of the Word to Isa. 42:6 and 49:6, where Isaiah refers to God's intention to make His Servant "a light to the nations". These are portions of the first two of four "Servant songs" in Isaiah, which were sometimes interpreted as referring to the nation, and yet could also be about an individual (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). Jesus was attempting to give them a definite hint to understand who He was, and what it was that He was going to do. They were not in a learning frame of mind, however.

Vs. 13 - *You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.* -- The Pharisees quote a statement Jesus had made months earlier (5:31) in a different context. There, Jesus stated that His witness alone would not be sufficient proof of the veracity of His claims. He cited five other witnesses to substantiate His identity.

Vss. 14-18 - *Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true* -- "The accuracy of My statement does not depend on someone else's agreement." *for I know where I came from, and where I am going; but you do not know* -- "My testimony is accurate because I know what I am talking about." The Pharisees did not understand, because they did not know all of the facts. *You people judge according to the flesh* -- That is, they were basing their opinions on how things looked to them outwardly (cf. 7:24). Finally, to satisfy their legalistic interpretation of things, Jesus states that He and His Father would be the two witnesses required to legally establish what He was saying.

Vss. 19,20 - *Where is Your Father?* -- Thinking to push Jesus into backing down, they asked Him to produce His Father. Instead of getting flustered, Jesus stated that they did not know Him or His Father; if they had known Him, they would have known His Father also. In effect, He was saying that to know Him was to know the Father. *no one seized Him* -- They had heard enough of His teachings to know that when He was speaking of His Father, He was referring to God (cf. 5:17,18). John's report indicates that they heard in these words another claim to be equal to God, but that they did not take action against Him there at that time.

Vss. 21-24 - Jesus picks up again on an earlier theme, saying that He would be leaving, that they would seek Him but not find Him, and that where He was going they would not be able to come (cf. 7:33,34). He adds here a new ingredient which adds a somewhat somber tone to His teaching, "you will seek Me, *and shall die in your sin...*". Their confused response prompted a further clarification from Jesus, contrasting their respective places of origin, *You are from* (Gk., ek = out from) *below, I am from* (ek) *above; you are of* (ek) *this world, I am not of* (ek) *this world. Therefore I said to y'all that you will die in your sins.* If that were not strange enough, He went on to say, "If ever y'all might not believe/trust that I am (Gk., egō eimi), y'all will die in your sins." This is an incredible statement to make! It implies that if they did believe, they would *not* die in their sins. Furthermore, what does it mean to "believe that I am"? Obviously, it could not mean simply that He existed, for He was speaking to them. The language strongly suggests that He is making another "I am" absolute statement (cf. notes for 4:26 & 6:20).

Vss. 25,26 - *Who are You?* -- His listeners did not miss the strangeness of what He seemed to be saying, and they asked for further clarification. *What have I been saying to you... ?* -- Jesus directs the focus to what He had already said. *I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you* -- He is not done telling them, nor evaluating them. *the things which I heard... I speak* -- Again, Jesus' modus operandi is to speak what the Father tells Him. He is the dependable source of Jesus' sayings.

Vss. 28,29 - *When you lift up the Son of Man* -- The word "lift up" could refer either to the physical raising up of Jesus on the cross, or it can mean "exalt" in the sense of honor or venerate. *then you will know that I am* -- Again, there is no "He" in the Greek. It is another "I am" absolute claim. *and I do nothing on My own initiative* -- Lit., "nothing from Myself". Another glimpse into the way Jesus lived and carried out His ministry. *I speak... as the Father taught Me* -- Both teachings and the signs He did were in response to the Father's initiative. *He who sent Me is with Me* -- Cf. 14:7-10.

Vss. 30-38 - From these verses, directed to those who believed in Him, we learn that it is *not* enough to believe. Jesus demands that we live out, or "remain in", His teachings if we are to be genuine disciples. Part of the purpose of this is so that we might escape the very real slavery of sin. *We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been enslaved to anyone* -- This comment set the course of the "great paternity debate" that follows. *I speak... [from] My Father; you do the things... you heard from your father.*

Vss. 39-41a - *Abraham is our father* -- The Jews attempt to hold on to their respectable identity. Jesus' response? "You don't act like sons of Abraham." *You are doing the deeds of your father.* -- Jesus is pushing them farther. If they don't have the same father as Jesus (vs. 38), and they are not sons of Abraham, then who is their father?

Vss. 41b,42 - *We were not born of fornication* -- We are not illegitimate sons. Illegitimacy was a great social disgrace in that culture. *we have one Father, even God* -- In their attempt to avoid the unthinkable, they have now said the very thing that they had been so outraged at Jesus for in 5:17,18. Jesus' response again, "You don't act like it." *If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God... [and] He sent Me.* -- Jesus not only kept them off balance, He is also added to His own claims.

Vss. 43-47 - In these verses Jesus finally delivers the confrontational punch He has been setting them up for. *You are of your father the devil* -- This is the only conclusion that explains their behavior and their spiritual dullness. *you want to do the desires of your father* -- Just as he is a murderer (Gen. 4:7; I Jn. 3:8-12) and a liar (Rev. 12:9), in the same way they reject the truth and have sought to kill Him (7:19,25; 8:37,40). *Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature* -- The principle that we act according to our nature compels them to look at themselves in light of the actions that they have expressed. What must their nature be? *Which of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?* -- Jesus' life and words are righteous, reflecting His nature. If they reject Him, what does that indicate about them? *He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.* -- The Greek for "words" is rhēma, meaning the personal spoken directives of God, not just the objective theological information about God. The Pharisees were great at learning and analyzing the teachings of Scripture, but they were dull of heart to give heed to the personal applications that would require them to change. The use of rhēma may also imply a mystical communication from God to the person, such as Jesus was experiencing, which those who are true children of God should expect. Jesus said they did not have this experience because they were not of God.

Vss. 48-50 - *You are a Samaritan and have a demon* -- Acting in character, they verbally attack Jesus. *I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.* -- The Lord exposes their inconsistency. How can they claim to be godly, when they dishonor and insult those who honor God? Vs. 50 says that He is not out to protect His own reputation, but Someone else does seek to honor Jesus (cf. 5:20-23; 8:54), and He is the Judge. Again, they are out of step with what God is doing.

Vs. 51 - *Truly, truly* -- A solemn declaration is coming. *if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.* -- What an incredible statement! The Jews reacted, "Abraham and the prophets died. Whom do you make yourself to be?" To clearly answer their question, Jesus picked up on Abraham again, saying that he "rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad". The Jews guffawed at Him saying, "C'mon, you're not even fifty years old, and you've seen Abraham?" Jesus' response, the most dynamic "I am" absolute claim in the book, "Before Abraham came to be, I am (egō eimi)." His opponents did not miss this direct parallel to the name of Yahweh in the OT in Ex. 3:14. They were outraged and picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy. *but Jesus hid Himself (or, was hidden), and went out of the temple.*