

Most conservative New Testament scholars do not think that 7:53-8:11 was part of the Gospel of John when it was first written, but was added centuries later. For example, Carson says, "Despite the best efforts [of some] . . . to prove that this narrative was originally part of John's Gospel, the evidence is against [them], and modern English versions are right to rule it off from the rest of the text (NIV) or to relegate it to a footnote (RSV)" (Carson, 333). Likewise, Leon Morris states, "The textual evidence makes it impossible to hold that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel" (Morris, 882). There is "overwhelming evidence that the section is non-Johannine" (Kostenberger, 246). These are typical of the common consensus among conservative scholars regarding the authenticity of these verses.

Thus, it is usually held that 8:12 and following is a continuation of the interaction that Jesus was having with the people at the Feast of Tabernacles of Chapter 7. This explains why 8:12 says that Jesus spoke to them "again."

***8:12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."***

There is much debate about what the imagery is that Jesus is drawing from when He says He is the Light of the world. Some say that He is connecting Himself to the ceremonies with lights that took place during the Feast of Tabernacles and was consciously fulfilling that imagery. There is nothing unlikely about this for lights played a dominant part of the celebration. Four huge candelabra were lit in the Court of the Women at the beginning of the week. At night men also danced in the streets with lit torches, singing praises to God. Historical records say that the light from the temple area was so bright that it spilled out into all of Jerusalem. If Jesus spoke His words on the last day of the feast (Jn. 7:37), these ceremonies would have had already ended, and His claim to be the Light of the world would speak loudly to the people (Morris, 436-437). "In favor of this view there is also the fact that the candelabra were lit in the Court of the Women, the most frequented part of the temple, and the very place in which Jesus delivered His address" (Morris, 437).

But the imagery may have other connections as well. The OT is full of images using light (Morris, 437). For example, the glory of God appeared in a cloud of fire that led the people in the wilderness (Exo. 13:21-22). The Israelites were also trained to sing, "the Lord is my light and salvation" (Psa. 27:1). The word of God is likened to a light that guides the path of the righteous (Psa. 119:105). In Isaiah 49:6 God says of His Servant (the messiah), "I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." The Messianic Age would be a time when the Lord would be a light to the people (Isa. 9:2; 60:1-3, 19-20). Zechariah 14:5b-9 is particularly important, for it was part of the liturgical readings on the first day of the feast. It says,

"Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other

half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.”

Likewise, in John 1:4 the Word that becomes flesh (Jesus) is called light and life. I John 1:5 says that God is Light. None of these are tied to the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles).

Jesus calls His followers “the light of the world,” as well (Matt. 5:14). Paul speaks of Christians as “lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15) though the word he uses for “light” is different than John 8 and primarily refers to heavenly bodies, or “light-bearers” (Morris, 438, n. 7). Of course, Christians and Christ are not light in exactly the same sense; He is the fundamental source of the world’s illumination (Morris, 438), Christians are not.

Light has different connotations in the Bible. The use of light in the Book of John, when combined with darkness, often has the connotation of purity and holiness. This is the meaning in 1 John 1:5 when it says, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” This is also what it means in John 3:19 when it says that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. However, light also has the idea of illumination, or making things visible that would otherwise be hidden by darkness (Jn. 1:4). This is the sense that Jesus is light; He is the one who (1) makes God visible (Jn. 1:18), (2) reveals God’s salvation (Matt. 4:16) and (3) illumines the path so that men can walk in a way that pleases God. John 1:9 says of Him, “There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”

These last two ideas are particularly dominant in John 8:12.

“Light is not a natural human possession; it comes only from Christ. . . To have the light is to have Jesus. There is no light apart from a right relationship to Him” (Morris, 438). The one who follows Christ (a present tense verb indicating a continual following) will not walk in darkness, but will have light by which to see. In John 11:9-10 Jesus says, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

But the light Christ offers is more than simply illuminating a path; those who walk by His light will also have the light of LIFE! As Carson says, “his whole being will be illuminated and the light will produce life” (Carson, 338).

The light of life transforms those who receive it; it produces changed behavior and values. Those who continue to practice the works of darkness cannot walk in fellowship with the light. 1 John 1:6 says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Their conduct belies their claim (Brooke, I John, 13).

Verse 12 is strategically placed in the Book of John; it rounds out the discussions at the Feast and prepares us for Chapter 9 where Jesus' claim to be light is graphically depicted in giving a blind man sight, while others who think they see are blind to the light (Carson, 338).

***8:13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."***

***8:14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going."***

In verse 12 Jesus' great claim puts the Pharisees in great opposition to Him. They therefore respond by saying that Jesus' testimony is invalid. This seems to be characteristic of their responses; they love to focus on legal technicalities and ignore the importance of what is being said. By saying that Jesus' testimony is not true, they mean it has no legal worth (though there is no doubt that they thought it was false as well) (Morris, 439).

The response of the Pharisees and others was predicted long before Chapter 8. John 1:5 said, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it;" John 3:19 told us that "men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." These truths are then illustrated throughout the Book of John. In John 8:43-46 Jesus asks, "Why do you not understand what I am saying?" He then answers His own question; "It is because you cannot hear My word. . . . You are of your father the devil . . . he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me."

In John 5:31 Jesus had said, "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid." He then went on to support His testimony with the testimony of others; here, He bases His testimony on His origin and destination (Kostenberger, 255). He has shifted His argument from the basis of abstract legality to the principle of His personal competence; He is able to bear witness of Himself better than anyone else due to the unique place He has as the Son of God (Tenny, 144).

Since Jesus came from the Father and is returning to the Father, He needs no other testimony to substantiate His claims. "The testimony of Jesus is therefore grounded in His unity with the Father, from whom His revelation is derived" (Beasley-Murray, 129). The Pharisees had no right to speak since they knew nothing of Him or the Father who sent Him.

Light attests to its own presence; it bears witness of itself and needs no other witnesses to support its existence (Carson, 339). It demonstrates its reality by its own presence (Tenny, 145).

***8:15 "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone.***

***8:16 But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me."***

The word "judgment" can have two meanings. It can simply mean "assess" or it can mean to pronounce condemnation. Jesus said that the Father had given all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:22), and that an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment (Jn. 5:28-29). In John 5 the judgment is the final judgment, the pronouncement of the verdict upon the believing and unbelieving. In the present context (Jn. 8), judgment is the ability to assess what is true.

The Pharisees reasoned (judged) by human standards, according to the limitations of their own human ability; they judged according to the flesh. But fallen men who live in a fallen world have no spiritual resources by which they can assess spiritual realities.

Jesus does not judge as they do; He does not appeal to superficial, fleshly criteria (Carson, 339); He spoke from His divine consciousness (Tenny, 145). If He did judge (assess a situation), His judgment would be true, for His words and actions are in conformity to the mission given to Him by the Father.

***8:17 "Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.***

***8:18 I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me."***

***8:19 So they were saying to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also."***

Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15 state the need of two or more witnesses for capital and criminal offenses. But the Pharisees subverted the law with their own interpretations. Nevertheless, based on what Jesus had said of Himself in verse 16, the twofold witness of Himself and the Father would meet their requirements. Jesus had the testimony of the Father to validate that what He had said about Himself was true.

The Pharisees' unbelief was a result of their unbelief in God. Had they known Him, they would have known Jesus.

***8:20 These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.***

The treasury stood in the women's court by the hall where the Sanhedrin met. It contained thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for offerings with inscriptions above each stating how the money would be used.

***8:21 Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."***

***8:22 So the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come '?"***

Verses 21-30 are a warning against the attitude of the Pharisees. The time for Jesus to leave is approaching, and with His departure the opportunity to hear and see the Father in Him will also be gone.

In these verses, Jesus contrasts the place He is going with the place they will go. When Jesus dies on the cross He will go to be with the Father, but that is a place where sinners cannot follow. They will die in their sins. Though they will continue searching for the Messiah and the eternal life that He offers (Jn. 5:39), they will not find what they are looking for since they have rejected the only true Messiah. This is easier to understand by someone who already knows that through the cross Jesus returned to the Father, but His words were an enigma to those who heard Him at that time.

***8:23 And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.***

***8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."***

Jesus and the Pharisees have two different origins. This is the fundamental reason why they do not recognize Jesus. They are from below, the realm of humanity; Jesus is from above, the realm of God. They are subject to the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31; 16:11), and have the same nature as those of the world who are in rebellion against God, Jesus is not. Therefore, if they do not repent and believe, they cannot find what they seek.

Verse 24 explains verse 21; it tells why Jesus said that they will die in their sins, namely, because they do not believe in who Jesus is.

Jesus said that they must believe that "I am He." Jesus' expression is not normal Greek at all (there is no predicate); literally He said, "unless you believe that ***I am***, you will die in your sins. The Jews are confused by it as the next verse proves; they ask "Who are you?" The answer doesn't become clear until verse 58.

Most modern interpreters rightly see the background of the "I am" statements of John 8: 24, 28 and 58 as Isaiah 40-55 - especially in the following verses where the same grammatical pattern appears in the Greek translation of the OT.

- Isaiah 41:4: Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. ***I am He.***'
- Isaiah 43:10: You are My witnesses, declares the LORD, And My servant whom I have chosen, In order that you may know and believe Me, And understand that ***I am He.*** Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.
- Isaiah 43:13: Even from eternity ***I am He,*** And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"

- Isaiah 43:25: I, **I am he** who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (ESV)
- Isaiah 46:4: even to your old age **I am he**, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. (ESV)
- Isaiah 48:12: Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; **I am He**, I am the first, I am also the last.

“In the Hebrew original, God discloses Himself in the repeated declaration “I am He”; it is this expression that the LXX [the LXX is an abbreviation for the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT] constantly renders by *ego eimi*, formally ‘I am.’ Isaiah 43:10 is especially close to the Johannine usage . . . In Isaiah, the contexts demand that ‘I am He’ means ‘I am the same,’ ‘I am forever the same,’ and perhaps even ‘I am Yahweh,’ with a direct allusion to Exodus 3:14 (cf. Isaiah 43:11-13). For others to apply this to themselves was blasphemous, an invitation to face the wrath of God (Isa. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). For Jesus to apply such words to Himself is tantamount to a claim to deity, once it is clear that the other potential meanings of *ego eimi* [I am] are contextually impossible” (Carson, 343, 344). And of course this is what the Jews eventually conclude in John 8:59 as they pick up stones to stone Him for what they considered to be blasphemy.

Jesus’ designation of Himself as “I am” gives the content of what must be believed. The Jews needed to accept Jesus’ testimony about Himself as the One in whom the fullness of God dwelt, as the One who perfectly revealed the Father. To reject this would result in them dying in their sins.

***8:25 So they were saying to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus said to them, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning?"***

***8:26 I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world."***

***8:27 They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father.***

Though the Jews didn’t understand exactly what Jesus was saying, He insisted that His witness in revealing God has been consistent from the beginning.

In verse 26 Jesus says that He has a lot to say concerning them. He speaks as the Father directs Him to, and He has come to testify about the world and its evil toward God. Jesus’ words bring judgment; they condemn those who reject Him.

Even though Jesus had been very clear in John 5 that the one who had sent Him was the Father, the Pharisees’ unbelief prevented them from hearing. Their response is summed up best by the words of Stephen: “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). Paul also said, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say, “you will keep on

hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them" (Acts 28:25-27) .

***8:28 So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.***

***8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."***

The full disclosure of who Jesus is takes place when the Son of Man is lifted up. When Jesus is lifted up on the cross, He is lifted up to the Father and returns to glory. Though His death is perpetrated by His enemies (when YOU lift the Son of Man up), it establishes Jesus' claim most forcibly.

***8:30 As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.***

***8:31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;"***

The Jews who had believed in verse 31 are apparently the many who had put their faith in Him in verse 30. But in Jesus' view these turn out to be slaves to sin (v.34), indifferent to Jesus' word (v.37), children of the devil (v.44), liars (v.55), and guilty of mob tactics, including attempted murder of the one in whom they have professed to believe (v.59; Carson, 346). Jesus has already introduced fickle faith (2:23-25 and 6:60); He now explains what it is that separates faulty faith from the real thing.

"The world is not just divided into two groups: disciples of Jesus and non-disciples. It is divided into three groups: non-disciples, unreal disciples, and real disciples—people who make no pretense of following Jesus, people that say they follow him and have a surface connection with him, and people who truly follow him" (Piper).

True discipleship is defined as abiding in Jesus' word (singular, not "words"); it is continuing the sum of all that He has taught. A genuine believer seeks to understand Jesus' word better and finds it more precious and more controlling; He allows it to direct his life (Bruce, 196). He is persuaded by its truth, attracted by its beauty and value, rests in its grace and power, and walks in its light (contrast Jn. 5:38).

It is interesting and significant to note that Jesus does not say "you will be" my disciples, but "you are" my disciples. Being a disciple is not taking a step of commitment after belief; it is what a true believer is. Likewise, abiding in Jesus' word is not the condition for discipleship, but describes what discipleship consists of. When a man abides in His word, he is Jesus' disciple (Morris, 456).

The importance of Christ's word in relationship to true faith is mentioned numerous times throughout the book.

- John 2:22: When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and **they believed** the Scripture, and **the word which Jesus had spoken**.
- John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who hears My word**, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
- John 4:41-42: 41 **Many more believed because of His word**; 42 and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for **we have heard for ourselves** and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."
- John 8:51: Truly, truly, I say to you, **if anyone keeps My word he will never see death**.
- John 12:48: He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.
- John 14:23-24: Jesus answered and said to him, "**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24 "**He who does not love Me does not keep My words**; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.
- John 17:6: I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; **they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word**.

**8:32 "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."**

The consequence of abiding in Jesus' word is the knowledge of the truth and freedom.

Truth is reality centered in Christ (1:17; 14:6), so knowledge of the truth is naturally associated with being His disciple. People come to know the truth not by simply intellectual assent, but by moral commitment.

The nature of freedom promised depends upon the nature of slavery Jesus has in mind; this is clarified in the discussion that follows (Carson, 349). Many quote this verse as if all that Jesus is saying is that knowing truth saves men from the darkness of error. Nothing could be further from Jesus' intent. The truth that sets people free is the truth that saves men from the darkness of sin; Jesus came to release the captives, not simply free men from intellectual error (Lk. 4:18; Morris, 456).

**8:33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free '?"**

If Jesus is offering freedom, then the assumption is that the Jews were slaves. This they emphatically deny. How can they be slaves when they are Abraham's descendants? Their sense of inherited privilege is so strong that they fail to see any need nor recognize the divine Word in front of them. Their very words demonstrate their slavery in the categories of the next verse. They were convinced that they were whole and had no need of a physician (Mk. 2:17). Therefore, Jesus finds Himself in a place where He must explain what He means by freedom and slavery (v. 34-36; Carson, 349).

**8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."**

Jesus now makes it plain what kind of slavery he is speaking about (and implicitly the kind of freedom He has in mind): everyone who sins is a slave to sin. So man's slavery is slavery to this power inside of him. Not only does the practice of sin prove that one is a slave to it, but sin also actively enslaves people; they cannot break away from it.

For Jesus, the ultimate bondage is not enslavement to a political or economic system, but the vicious slavery to moral failure, and the rebellion against God who has made us. The despotic master is not Caesar, but shameful self-centeredness, an evil and enslaving devotion to created things at the expense of the worship of the Creator. In Jesus' view, Caesar himself was a slave (Carson, 350).

Though slavery to sin is slavery to the domination of sin, it is also slavery to the damnation of sin; slavery to sin leads to hell.

Jesus alone can free us from the domination and damnation of sin. He frees us from sin's dominion over us by changing our nature at the root through the new birth. He frees us from the damnation of sin by becoming a damnation for us. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

Also see Ro. 6:17, 20; II Pet. 2:19 for slavery; Ja. 1:25; 2:12; II Cor. 3:17 for liberty.

**8:35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever."**

From the notion of slavery (v.34), the thought progresses to the status of slaves. The Jews thought of themselves as sons of Abraham (sons in God's family – Morris, 458), but in reality they were slaves. This strikes at the root of their assurance, for a slave had no permanent place in the family (cf. Matt. 3:9; 8:11-12; Mk. 12:9). The genuine son in the context is not a Christian, but Christ Himself. And the son belongs to the household forever. As the Son, He has authority to set the slave free (v.36; Carson, 350).

**8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."**

Verse 36 sums up what Jesus is saying. As the Son of God, those who Jesus liberates are truly free (Ro. 8:2; Gal. 5:1).

True freedom is not liberty to do what we please, but freedom to do as we ought; and it is genuine freedom, because doing what we ought now pleases us (Carson, 350). There are at least three aspects that make us free.

1) True freedom is *desiring* to do what we ought to do. If we don't have the desire to do something, we are not fully free to do it. We can force ourselves to do what we ought to do, but when we do it there is

a constraint and pressure on us that we don't want. That is not freedom. Jesus offers to change our hearts so that we desire to do what God wants us to do.

2) True freedom gives us *the ability* to do what we ought to do. If we have the desire to do something, but no ability to do it, we are not free to do it. Jesus empowers us so that we can do what we want to do.

3) True freedom gives us the *opportunity* to do what we ought to do. If we have no opportunity to act, we are not free to do what we desire. God has prepared a path of good works before us that we can walk in (Eph. 2;10).

In conclusion, Jesus gives us freedom from the dominion and damnation of sin and replaces it with the desire, ability, and opportunity to do what pleases God.