

“Partners in Truth”  
Pastor John Bronson

John 8:12-30

May 13, 2012

Order of Worship for May 13, 2012, Mother’s Day!

Call to Worship: Ephesians 2:4-10 and Titus 2:11-14

I would like to include the Nicene Creed this Sunday

Message Title: “Partners in Truth”  
Message Text: John 8:12-30

Worship Theme: This is a message about the Trinity. I suggest songs that one way or another bring the three Persons of God to mind.

Sunday Night in the Word  
Cancelled so we can honor the Mothers who cared for us!  
Next Week: A Study through the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7

**Pre Service Song**

“Holy, Holy, Holy!” Song # 3

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Call to Worship and Prayer** Hebrews 4:14-5:9

**Special Music:** “I’m Gonna Bless the Name of the Lord”  
by EFC’s Children’s Church Choir

**Congregational Recitation of The Nicene Creed**

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

“All Creatures of Our God and King” Song # 63  
“Father, I Adore You” Song # 191

**Offering and Offertory**

**Message:** “Partners in Truth” John 8:12-30  
Pastor John Bronson

**Songs of Gladness for God’s Grace:**

“Glorify Thy Name” Song # 9

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening Studies:**

Cancelled so we can honor the Mothers who  
cared for us! Next week begins a study through  
the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7

“The Prayer Closet”

May 13, 2012

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*  
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Steve and Carol Lyons in Tanzania:** the Spirit will impart fresh joy in the work; the Lord will ensure their physical, spiritual, relational and political well being; those they serve will discern the will of God and be eager in growth

**President Obama:** the Spirit will bring life changing and redemptive conviction of sin and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; the Lord will impart the wisdom to rise above partisan politics; the truth of his past and his character will become known to all

**Deacons and Deaconesses:** they will pursue and enjoy the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as they carry out their ministries; the Lord will open doors of opportunity for their service to others; they will display the character and wisdom of Christ in all that they do

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** MSgt. David Howell, Army (son in law of Eileen Hewitt): that communications within the family remain open and that David not get deployed away from his son Jared.

**Young Adult of the Week:** Nathan Giordano at California State University, Chico (son of Tim and Laura Giordano): thanks for the prayers after his recent accident; please pray for his finals coming up and continue to pray over the summer for his continued healing and regaining of strength

**Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family:** Carol Bernerd, Marsha Bernhard (now at UC Davis), Harley Chapman Sr., Nathan Giordano, Diane Kinnamont, Carol Koehler, Mike Kokoletsos, Volker Ladendorf, Roseanne Lane, Dick Miller, John Montgomery, Fred & Jean Pauly, Phil Peterson, Jean Price, Cindy Rodney, John Stancik, Wally Yates  
(please call the office to request updates to this list)

[The titled for today’s message is “Partners in Truth”, and the text is] John 8:12-30. If you are familiar with this particular portion of the Gospel, [you know that] it is easy to kind of skim quickly through most of this chapter. It is nice to go from the statement, “*I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,*” – that is verse 12, that is a great verse – and then skip right straight over and go all the way down to verses 31 and 32 where we hear Jesus say, “*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’*” It is hard to compete with a couple of statements like that so there is an understandable eagerness to run quickly from one to the other and to grab them up and to reflect upon them and draw inspiration and strength from them.

But what we read in verses 13-30, though perhaps in the way they are presented to us [are] somewhat less inspiring and certainly less immediate to our understanding, [they] are no less essential. Indeed, they are no less remarkable in what they tell us about the Lord whom we serve. Join with me. I am going to read verses 12 right down to verse 30 and then I will make a few comments.

*“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.’ So the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.’ Jesus answered, ‘Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.’ They said to him therefore, ‘Where is your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’ These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.*

*So he said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.’ So the Jews said, ‘Will he kill himself, since he says, “Where I am going, you cannot come”?’ He said to them, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.’ So they said to him, ‘Who are you?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.’ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. 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.’ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.”*

Regarding these verses, one man wrote, “These profound verses develop and unfold the key thought of Jesus in the gospel and cannot therefore be understood apart from the Gospel as a whole.” Another made this comment: the unique relationship between Jesus and His Father is the dominating thought of this whole section. The difficulty we have, I think, in getting to that is that the section is presented to us as a kind of argument between Jesus and the Pharisees. So we have to find the truth through, as it were, the haze of that argument. But that should not be hard for us to do.

Once again in response to Jesus – look up at verse 12-13 – we hear the Pharisees respond to Jesus. Jesus makes this incredibly profound statement and their response is a technical avoidance of what Jesus had to say. When working through the Gospel paragraph by paragraph it is easy for us to lose sight of the larger picture that Jesus is constantly pursuing and likewise John. As John writes the Gospel, we should always remind ourselves that the intention that he has is for us to see that Jesus is the Savior sent by God. In the meantime, as I’ve mentioned before, it is Jesus intention to reveal the truth about the Father. All the time we should be asking ourselves, “What am I

learning about Jesus as the Savior and what am I being told about God as the Father who sends Him?” Those are the two emphases that dominate this entire Gospel.

If we allow that awareness to be pushed away and instead we get caught up in the details of the arguments of the Pharisees we can be pulled into their frame of mind. Responding to Jesus’ assertion that He is the light of the world, how do they respond? Do they say, “What do you mean you are the light of the world?” No what they say is, “Ah, ah, no, no Jesus, you are testifying about yourself. That is not proper. You are supposed to have another person testify for you.”

Now it was true in the Old Testament that you were supposed to have one or two witnesses beside yourself to give a testimony regarding whatever the matter at hand was. So on technical grounds they are right to object. On technical grounds Jesus doesn’t look so good. Now let me help you identify with this. How many are familiar with our court system? How many are aware of the fact that now you may have a record, but when you come into a trial all that evidence is sealed. All evidence of your character and your past behavior and what you have done is locked away. That is because the judge and, the jury if involved, are supposed to be able to judge you without prejudice. So we are face with people who have horrific records and yet are treated as if they are without that past. When you are dealing with human beings that is an understandable caution because our judgment is often warped and we are unable to hear the truth because of the prejudices that are already built up in our minds. Indeed the Pharisees themselves are a beautiful example of this very thing, an inability to hear what Jesus has to say because they are already filled with prejudice regarding whom they think he is.

But this only makes sense if you forget everything that Jesus has done and said and John has recorded in the Gospel. For instance, do you remember a man named Nicodemus came and spoke with Jesus at night? What is essential is to remember that Nicodemus is a Pharisee, and Nicodemus sits on the Sanhedrin which is the ruling council in Israel. This is his testimony. He says, *“Rabbi, we – who is this “we”? It is we all, we Pharisees, we the rulers of Israel, we who keep tabs on the religious life of the people - 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.”* What you have to do, beloved, is you have to take that statement in chapter 3:2 and put it right next to what you are reading in chapter 8. The Pharisees know that Jesus is not an ordinary man. What do they know about him? They know that Jesus has healed lepers. They know that Jesus has made lame men whole. They know that Jesus has raised men from the dead. They know that Jesus has given sight to men born blind. They know that Jesus has fed the multitude. So the man who raises the dead and heals the blind says, “I am the light of the world” and the response of the Pharisees is, “Oh, no, no, you are testifying for yourself. You need to get somebody else to testify for you.” Really?

What kind of mind and what condition of heart refuses such testimony and evidence? That is the question that should constantly come before us in our thinking. Looking at verses 13-15 it is as if Jesus had done none of the things that I have just listed. So the Pharisees respond to the claim that that He is the light of the world and His followers will have the light of life by complaining that He is speaking on His own behalf rather than having somebody else speak for Him, someone like John the Baptist, whom they knew. Perhaps they forgot about John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin. Jesus doesn’t bring up John because He knows it will not make the least difference. But notice verse 13. The Pharisees make a fundamental error in that verse. Do you notice what they say? *“...the Pharisees said to Him, ‘You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.’*” What is the matter with that statement? They have no way of knowing. They have claimed to know it is not true, but they can’t know that. They have erred. How does doubt seek clarification? If you have doubt, you look for further information. You want to engage in a dialogue; you want to do further research; you want to clarify things that are obscure, perhaps get more information that will help you come to a conclusion about something. The Pharisees have no desire to do that at all. The Pharisees want to seal the file immediately and stamp it: false, because of course they do not want to hear. The Pharisees cannot, of course, look upon Jesus’ heart. Jesus says to them, *“I do not judge.”* He is contrasting

Himself with the Pharisees. Why did the Pharisees judge people? Well, to condemn them. The Pharisees are blind because they habitually hide the reality of [their] sin behind the pretense of ritual and ceremony and good works. All of these are outward.

Notice what Jesus does in verse 16. In v. 16 Jesus says to them, *“Even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.”* Jesus is shifting the terms of this conversation. The Pharisees have been conducting a conversation as if Jesus was on trial. They raise questions about legal proceedings and witnesses. Jesus responds by pointing to the intimate relationship that He has with the Father. He moves the discussion from the horizontal to the vertical. He moves the discussion from a contest of wills and wits to the issue of purpose and character. In most traditional societies a son was to be like his father such that if you knew the father you would know the son. Jesus is pushing these Pharisees to deal with the question of His relationship with His Father. He does not first say of the Father that He is the witness for or on behalf of Jesus. What [Jesus] says in verse 16 is, “I and the Father are partners.” “It is not I who judge alone, but I and the Father with me.” He is saying to these men, “Listen, pay attention, draw close, open your mind, perceive: what you see me about is not something I am about on my own, but the Father is also with me in doing what I am doing. So He says, *“...it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.”* Having asserted the unity of purpose and identity and character, Jesus answers the matter of witness in verse 18. He says *“I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”* Now we have two.

In verse 19 Jesus’ accusers are up against it. The obvious response to Jesus’ assertions is to ask, “How does the Father bear witness?” or perhaps, “What is the witness the Father bears for you?” Why wouldn’t the Pharisees ask that? They do not want to know. That is just exactly what the Pharisees refuse to acknowledge. They do not want to know, they do not want to think about what Jesus has done: all the mighty acts that the Father has accomplished through Him. So what Jesus does is He takes their statement regarding who [His] Father is, as an affirmation of their ignorance. He says, *“You know neither me nor my Father.”* The implication is that to know one is to know the other. *“If you knew Me you would know my Father.”* Behind the words being exchanged between [Jesus and] His accusers here is the unstated reality that the Pharisees have already judged and condemned Jesus. All they want to do is kill Him. That is their consistent intention. By drawing His identity with the Father closer and closer, Jesus is challenging these men to recognize that to judge Him is to judge the Father. If the Pharisees understood Jesus, they would have been terrified. This is actually spelled out for us by a Pharisee later on, named Gamaliel. If you read Acts 5:33-39, you will hear Gamaliel making this warning comment. He says to his fellow Pharisees in the Sanhedrin, be careful, you may even be found opposing God. Very likely [the Pharisees] drew the right inference here in the eight chapter [of John], and very likely the Pharisees were hugely angered by what Jesus had to say. Why do I say that? Look at the end of verse 20: *“No one arrested him because his hour had not yet come.”*

Beloved we can stop right here at verse 21 and I want to ask you think about [this]. Did you ever get into a conversation about spiritual things, about Jesus Christ, about the way of salvation, about the reality of sin and salvation, and you talk with somebody and it seemed like no matter what you did you could not get through to them. They did not seem to pick up on anything you had to say; that no matter what kind of arguments you put in front of them they remained a wall. You went away feeling so inadequate, such a failure; you felt like there must have been something [you] could have said that would have gotten through. Well, maybe you were dealing with someone who had no intention at all of hearing what you had to say. Please realize that the Lord Jesus Christ had exactly that kind of experience in dealing with the Pharisees. Our words are not magic. It is the Spirit of God who penetrates the resistant heart and the dead mind. So we must not think we can rely just on the words we say, or come up with some remarkable formula of truth that will somehow get around every possible defense mechanism in the heart and the mind of the person we are dealing with. The only thing that can get around them is the Spirit of God. So we should spend much time in prayer.

Looking at verse 21, there may have been a time lapse between the twentieth and the twenty second verse, but John writes as if it was a continuous conversation. The Pharisees are pursuing Jesus not for truth and faith but to silence Him by death. Jesus now turns up the heat of this conversation. Imagine yourself a Pharisee. Pharisees were all about purity. They were all about being blessed by God. So Jesus says to them, you are going to die in your sins. That is a nice conciliatory thing to say! But notice more specifically that He says, I am going away and you will die in your sin. I am going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. I want us to think about this. This is a highly confrontational statement. The Pharisees believe in eternal life even though that was not clearly taught in the Old Testament. To die in ones sin was to remove yourself from the blessings of God. It was a disaster, a catastrophe in the mental framework, the belief system of the Pharisee. Belief in God, perhaps belief in the Law or in Moses as the giver of the Law, was necessary. What does Jesus say to them? Jesus says, unless you believe me you will die in your sin; where I am going you cannot come. How do they respond? “Is Jesus going to kill Himself?” Is Jesus suicidal? You have to understand how far that statement is from an honest response to what Jesus has just said to them. He has just said, you stand in danger of the eternal loss of your souls, and they say, are you going to commit suicide? Let’s go back: “You are in danger of eternal damnation! Not me!” But they do not want to hear it. Because they don’t want to hear, they don’t.

In verses 23-24 Jesus again tries to shift their thinking. Now He moves to a much more profound level. *“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he, you will die for your sins.”* If the first time Jesus said “you will die for your sin” wasn’t enough to pull His opponents into a discussion of the real issues, surely this one will be. Having apparently not picked up on Jesus’ allusion to His relationship with the Father, now Jesus is as blunt as He can be. He says, “You and I are not at all the same. You and I are of entirely different origins: it is not social class, it is not religious tradition, it is not nationality: We are fundamentally different and distinct in the origin of our being, and unless you believe that I am the one sent, the one that you are waiting for, you are dead.

Here is another place for us to step back from the narrative and recognize what Jesus has said in its implications for us. What must they believe in order to be saved? [They must believe] that He has been sent by God the Father. Beloved it is not enough to believe that Jesus died and rose for your sins. Do I have your attention? It is not enough to believe that Jesus died and rose for your sins. You must know Who Jesus was and is. You must understand that He is the divine Son of God incarnate, become human flesh. Because even if Jesus was a sinless man and He died and He rose again from the dead, His death would be sufficient only for one other man. He needs to have divinity as an aspect of His being, so that the worth or the merit of what He has done is capable and sufficient for covering all of humanity and all of its sin. That is why I want you to know the Nicene Creed; that is why I want you to know the Apostles’ Creed. I do not want you to believe in a little tiny Jesus, but I want you to believe in the eternal Son of the eternal Father Who gave His life for us that we might not only be saved, but enter into the eternal life of the Triune God in a manner that is beyond our comprehension. I want you to believe something big enough that you are willing to die for it.

The response of the Pharisees in v. 25 is not necessarily clear in the English translation. You may have noticed I read it in a rather odd way. Verse 25 says, beginning at verse 24, *“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”* So they said to him, *“Who are you?”* That is the comment; that is the way it comes across, the inflection: “You’ve got to be kidding! I mean, come on!” that is the nature of the response. You have to understand that. At this point the Pharisees obviously do grasp some of what Jesus is saying and for them it is preposterous and blasphemous. Jesus’ response is equally emphatic. Notice how He responds. I am what I have said I am from the beginning. I have consistently presented Myself as something extraordinary. Don’t treat me as ordinary! If you do, you are lost.

It will not do to think of this as a calm or studious discussion or a teaching session. Had we been there surely we would have sensed heat in the exchange. Look at verse 26. Notice what is interesting about verse 26? In verse 26 He does not say, “I have so much to tell you.” What He says is, “I have so much to say about you.” My response to that is [to wonder], to whom? Who is Jesus planning to talk to about us? Do you want to guess? [It is] the Father. Remember that in John 5:22 and 30 Jesus has already said, *“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. . . . As I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* Beloved, we readily celebrate the truth that Jesus is Lord and Savior, and rightly we should. But sometimes we forget that Jesus is also to judge. Often we speak as if faith in Jesus allows us to escape all judgment. But this is a lie. It is not true. In Acts 17:30-31 Paul says this: *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”* [Someone will object.] “O well, John, you must understand that judgment is for the non-believers, not for us who are already believers in Jesus.” Let me take you to the next verses: in 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul again speaks about judgment. Repentance is a change of mind which brings us into harmony or agreement with God. But that is not sufficient at the time of our initial belief in recognizing the reality of our sin and the desperate condition that we put our faith in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. In the tenth verse of Second Corinthians 5, we read this: *“We must all appear – how many are left out of “all”? – before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”*

In verse 27 John says that Jesus’ opponents do not understand what Jesus is saying. They do not understand that He is speaking regarding the Father. They remain blind and deaf to the truth despite all the evidence and the teaching of Jesus. Jesus responds to their self-imposed ignorance with the remarkable words of verse 28. *“When you lift up the Son of man – they knew exactly what that meant; it was a common phrase. What it meant was “crucifixion” – then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak just as the Father taught me. He who sent me is with me, He has not left me alone for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”* Nowhere else, beloved, in all of scripture do we have so clear and exact a statement of the relationship between God the Son and God the Father. In this verse, in these verses, in this dialogue Jesus is engaged in with the Pharisees we have a remarkable insight and reflection on the Trinity. I am going to run these by quickly. Each [statement] is worth a sermon which I won’t preach at the moment. Each one of the members of the Trinity does what each of the others does. None of them act independently of the others, however neither do they act confusedly. When you hear them, when they are recorded in the Word of God, you realize that they stand in distinction because they are able to speak objectively about what each of the others is doing. They are perfect in their agreement, but they are not simply an undifferentiated “one”. There are three Persons in One God. If Jesus’ accusers had listened to Him, they would have been dumbfounded. But they couldn’t.

What does Jesus say? Why does He say that it is only after He has been lifted up that they will finally know that He is the one sent from God and has acted in perfect submission? No answer is given, but we know the answer. It was mentioned to us before. It is only after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit is given. This is what Peter says in the first truly Christian sermon which you will find in Acts 2. When they had heard what Peter said, *“...they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ – What was their problem? Well, they finally understood: Jesus is the One Whom the Father sent, and they killed Him – “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* About three thousand did.

Did you ever wonder whether some of those three thousand included some of those Pharisees right there in Jerusalem? After all, Peter had denied Jesus three times. Then the question is, if those hearts can be softened, do we believe ours can be softened, and that we also can believe Jesus is the One sent by the Father that we might be

saved? I encourage you, whether you are already or have not yet made that decision to take time to talk to God, to let your heart and your mind be open, to seek His forgiveness and to ask that He would bless you, that you might not be lost, but rather know the joy of His salvation.

Let us pray: gracious Father, it would be an easy deceit for us to distance ourselves from the Pharisees and assume we are altogether in a different place, but we are not. Like them we resist the truth. Like them we play word games, games of logic, games of denial, games of avoidance. Like them we are in desperate need but often pretend that it is well. So please forgive us and renew us by Your grace and truth. We ask this, giving thanks Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for further thought and understanding:

1. Have you ever brought up small matters in order to avoid dealing with large issues?
2. How can you tell the difference between questions of honest doubt or uncertainty and questions designed to shut off all further searching for answers or for truth?
3. What are some ways people try to cover over their sins by doing good deeds?
4. Do you often think of the Trinity? Do you ever meditate on the fact that God is simultaneously the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, three distinct persons, but one God?
5. Have you ever been angry at God or at someone claiming to speak for God? In your experience what has made you most angry, frustrated or embarrassed by those claiming to speak for God?
6. Why is it necessary to believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God in addition to believing that He died for your sins and those of all humanity?
7. In what sense is Jesus our judge and why is this essential for our well-being?
8. Why is repentance a necessary aspect of our being saved