

## **Like Father, Like Son**

We have a number of English phrases that suggest children are like their parents, that sons are like fathers. We say, “like father, like son”, “the apple doesn't fall far from the tree”. We say “a chip off the old block”.

In the ancient world, it was understood that a son is like his father. In Jewish culture, the son usually took on his father's trade or profession. His very name was either exactly or partly his father's name. Simon son of Jonas was called Shimon ben Yonah. When John the Baptist was born, they expected as the firstborn to name him Zacharias.

Family resemblance applies not only physically but also spiritually. However, in the realm of the spirit, the inner person, ultimate realities, there are only two families. Just like in the physical world, there is a spiritual father of each family. The children in that family always possess a family resemblance to the spiritual father. And when human history is over, no longer will there be a mingling and mixing of the two families. Instead, everyone in one family will be together in one place, and everyone in another family will be together in another place.

The Lord Jesus describes these two families for us in His debate with the Jewish rulers in John 8. What we are going to find out is that spiritual reality doesn't sound anything like the way people talk today. Celebrities, politicians, influencers all say things like “We're all part of God's family. In the end, aren't we all God's children?” But Jesus says something shockingly different. He says that there is God's family, but then there is also the devil's family. And you don't have to be a satanist or a devil-worshipper to be in the devil's family. In fact, the devil would probably prefer you not realise if you are in his family.

Certainly the people Jesus spoke to in this chapter would never have placed themselves in the devil's family. They were, like most people today, absolutely convinced that they were part of God's family.

And that has dire consequences for everyone. It means that most people simply assume they are God's children, and will join God's family at the end of time. But this debate between Jesus and the religious rulers should shake us out of any complacency and make us urgently consider: am I really in God's family?

This final part of John 8, from verse 31 to the end of the chapter concludes a long debate that Jesus had with the Jewish religious leaders during the feast of Tabernacles. This is late September, early October, and Jesus was here in obedience to the Law, but at great personal risk to His life, since they wanted to kill Him. And we've seen the confusion, and the flight from truth, and the set-up they tried to engineer with the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus telling them that He is the light, and the living water.

Here, we can summarise the whole last part of this debate as, “Who's your father?” The enemies of Jesus are asking that of Jesus, and Jesus is essentially asking the same question of them – who's your father? And, as we listen, we need to ask ourselves that question, spiritually speaking. Jesus is going to give three family traits of those in God's family. Three markers that would identify you as being in the family of God.

### **I. God's Children Freely Obey God's Will**

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.  
32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."  
33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How  
can You say, 'You will be made free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever  
commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.  
36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:31–36)

The Jews that believed on Jesus probably only went halfway in their belief. They were superficially impressed with Him, but once He started explaining what it meant to be His disciple, they were offended.

The first way they're offended is that they don't think of themselves as being in any kind of bondage, and so they can't see how Jesus would be setting them free. In the rabbinic literature, it was often said that every Jew is a descendant of kings, and so none are in bondage. Notice how many times they bring up Abraham in this debate. We're Abraham's family! We're Abraham descendants. Whatever Abraham was, is what we are!

But Jesus explains that the deepest and worst slavery of all is a voluntary slavery. It is the slavery you apply for and remain in. Slaves that are captured and forced to work long for release and freedom. But people who have slowly but surely enslaved themselves are in the deepest bondage, because they often don't realise it.

The man chained to his anger doesn't see it. He thinks it is other people who make him angry. The one addicted to social media, or endless scrolling sees it as a fun hobby, perfectly under control. The one consumed by pornographic lust tells himself he just has really strong appetites, it's not a problem. The girl addicted to dreams of marriage, wallowing in pseudo-romance says something similar: I just want love. The person obsessed with the next deal, and greater profits, and more money smiles and says, "You're kidding if you think I'm enslaved. I've never had more options or freedom in my life!" The gamer, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the sluggard, the workaholic, the gossip, the drama queen, the bully, the control freak are all species of chosen slavery.

Jesus says that whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. He doesn't mean an isolated act. He means that every sin is like a gently tightening grip. Every time you give a sin space in your life, the grip tightens, the appetite grows, the habits cements. But because it is chosen, most people don't call it slavery.

Jesus says that His disciples, God's children, are free, truly free, because they know Truth. Truth about what? Truth about what this sin really is and does to you, like finding out a food you love is really bad for you. Truth about what Jesus did on the Cross so you no longer have to serve sin. After Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, the slaves in America were free, and after the Civil War, there was no longer any doubt. But for several years, there were still some slaves in the South who did not know they were truly free. Some Christians do not understand the truth that salvation has not only freed them from future punishment for sin, but it frees you from present power of sin. The cross of Christ has a present, current, now salvation for you, that breaks the addictive power of sin, and replaces it with greater promises, better pleasures, sweeter loves, more satisfying things. The truth sets you free.

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. <sup>18</sup> And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup> I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. <sup>20</sup> For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

(Romans 6:16–20)

The child of God has a choice whose employment he will enter. He can go back to the old master of sin, or he can enter the service of Christ. With every choice, we are either serving the old, or serving the new.

But if you are not in God's family, the very idea of there being a choice is foreign to you. You know only one choice: please self. Only one thing drives you, your own pleasures, desires, glory, and that means addictions, obsessions, ruts, seemingly immovable and unchangeable ways and traits and habits.

God's children are free, not simply because we can do what we want. God's children are free because we can say no to what we want. God's children are free because what we want is now more than purely selfish wants. Included in our hearts are now wants and desires we didn't used to have, wants and desires to know and love and enjoy God.

Is that your freedom? That's a sign that God is your Father, when you are truly free to please God.

Jesus pushes further regarding the true family of God.

## II. God's Children Deeply Retain God's Words

<sup>37</sup> "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, **because My word has no place in you.** <sup>38</sup> I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." <sup>39</sup> **They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."** Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the **truth** which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup> You do the deeds of your father."

Yes, you are the physical descendants of Abraham, says Jesus. But your actions are not the actions of Abraham. Abraham didn't try to murder people who told him the truth. Abraham did not try to destroy people who spoke God's Word.

In other words, Abraham loved God's Word. Abraham loved the truth. Abraham was a child of God, because Abraham treasured God's Word.

By contrast, in verse 37, Jesus says, "my Word has not place in you." This means, my Word makes no headway within you, it does not penetrate, it does not take root. Several times in this debate, Jesus says that people in God's family receive and keep the truths of God's Word, but those not in God's family are not able to listen, receive, believe, or keep God's Word.

<sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand My speech? **Because you are not able to listen to My word.**

<sup>45</sup> But because I tell the **truth**, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup> Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the **truth**, why do you not **believe** Me? <sup>47</sup> **He who is of God hears God's words;** therefore you do not hear, because you are not **of God.**"

<sup>51</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone **keeps My word** he shall never see death."

<sup>55</sup> Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and **keep His word.**

Here are some remarkable and revealing facts about humans. Verse 43 says that the mental inability to really understand Jesus comes from a deeper moral refusal to listen to God's Word. People don't believe because they do not have an inner nature that treasures truth.

Verse 46 , Jesus makes the staggering claim to be sinless. No one could pin a single sin on Jesus. “It is impossible to envisage any other figure in history making such a claim. In the light of their inability to point to any sin in him their continuing failure to believe in him is shown for the sham it was. If there was no sin, then he was indeed speaking the truth and if he was speaking the truth then they should have believed.”

Even though they knew that, the perversity of the human heart is to reject the truth (v45). But here is the summary in v 47 – the one of God – the one born from God, with God's nature, being God's child – that one hears God's Words. The reason they don't hear, is that they are not of God.

<sup>6</sup> We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

And now here comes the knockout blow.

<sup>44</sup> You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Here's why you hate the truth and want to murder the Man telling you the truth. Because you are true children of your real spiritual father – the Devil. Satan wanted to murder the human race by leading Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He knew when they ate it would bring death, so he deliberately led them into that sin, and murdered them. He has no truth in him but is wholly given over to his own deceptions. He lies and begets lies; he is the father of lies.

So people who hate truth, who cannot tolerate the hard and difficult nature of truth show what family they are from. The family that prefers lies, falsities, distortions of reality convenient to itself, perversions of reality that flatter, complete re-telling of life and history to blame others and exonerate self, to retain your own comfort, convenience, and pleasant self-image. That family has no room for God's Words in their hearts.

This is one of the greatest signs of being in God's family: you want the truth, however difficult it may be to hear it, however convicting it feels to listen to it, however painful it is sometimes to receive it. But something has happened to you. Your nature is truth-hungry. You no longer censor and edit and suppress the truth; you no longer flee from the light, and run from the truth.

You do something very unusual. You go to the truth. You are like a criminal who drives to the police station. You no longer want to hide in the Garden in the trees making fig leaves for yourself. You want to stand in the blazing, exposing light of God's truth, because you want nothing less than pure Reality: God as He is, the world as it is, and self as you really are. You are a new creature: a truth-seeking and truth-loving creature. God's Word abides in you, you have a place for it, you keep it.

Sometimes we talk about something someone said to us, and we use the phrase “those words really stayed with me.” Or we say, “I'll never forget what so-and-so said to me”. “I've kept those words in my heart ever since.” Those phrases all testify to the human ability to internalise words, to keep them, implant them, make them your own, and recall them, refer back to them, hear them again. The regenerate child of God does that with God's Word, with the truth of inspired Scripture.

Ask yourself: is the Bible like that to me? Are its words some of the unforgettable words, the words I keep in my heart, the words I refer back to, the words I recall? Are God's Words the truth we come

back to even when they are uncomfortable words, inconvenient words, demanding words, difficult words?

If you find yourself at war with God's words, perhaps you must ask Him for a new heart, a new nature.

Freedom from sin, love of truth are signs of being in God's family. But the ultimate way of identifying with God's family has to do with whether you acknowledge the firstborn Son. If you are a child of God, then you must love the oldest brother, as it were.

### III. God's Children Really Love God's Son

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

The Jewish leaders seem to be saying that as Abraham's descendants, they were not like the Gentiles, born out of immoral relationships. It is also possible that they are taking a swipe at Jesus Himself. The virgin birth of Jesus was not understood by all, and it is likely that the enemies of Jesus had picked up the rumour that Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph, and that Jesus was somehow the illegitimate child of Mary's fornication with someone else.

Instead, they claim to be in God's family as Jews, as the children of Abraham. Jesus makes a powerfully logical reply. Since I am from God, if you really were God's children, you would love Me. I am God's Son, He sent Me. So if you were God's children, we'd be family, and you would love me. But you're trying to kill me.

He goes on to explain, as we've seen, that they are acting not like Abraham, not like God, but like Satan.

Well, their response to him is to say that he is the one on the side of Satan.

<sup>48</sup> Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

Likely, what they mean here is that Jesus is a heretic, and is demon-possessed for calling them children of Satan. Jesus calmly responds

<sup>49</sup> Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. <sup>50</sup> And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. <sup>51</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."

Whereas the leaders keep claiming Jesus is making Himself out to be something great, Jesus keeps responding that He only seeks the glory and honour of His Father. He speaks of His high position in terms of obedience and service. He reminds them of the promise of being His disciple in his Father's family: eternal life.

<sup>52</sup> Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' <sup>53</sup> Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"

This is a classic case of when you don't want to understand someone else, you will inevitably keep misunderstanding that person. Jesus means that becoming one of His disciples will avoid eternal

death; they think He is promising present immortality to His followers. Of course, Jesus Himself has that kind of indestructible life, and He can certainly grant it to whom He will, but only through sharing in His death and resurrection.

But now Jesus answers their taunt, “Who do you make yourself out to be?”

<sup>54</sup> Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. <sup>55</sup> Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and **keep His word**. <sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.”

The answer is: if I were on a solo mission for myself, it would be worthless. But it is actually the Father who has sent me and has given me this position and authority. I cannot, just for your sakes lie about myself or about my Father. You don't know Him, but I do.

And then to tie it altogether, since they have kept mentioning Abraham, Jesus says, Abraham actually saw my day and rejoiced. Abraham, as a child of God, rejoiced to see Christ's day. How did Abraham see Christ's day? It may be that Abraham perceived that if all nations would be blessed through his descendants, that Messiah would come through his descendants,. Some have thought that when Abraham went to present Isaac as a sacrifice, and told Isaac that “God Himself will provide a lamb”, that he perceived in shadowy form the day of Messiah. Perhaps in Melchizedek, Abram saw some foreshadowings of Messiah the King and Priest. Whatever it was, Jesus is essentially saying, you think you have a relationship with Abraham. But you only have an ethnic one. Abraham and I were friends, loving the same things, believing the same things.

<sup>57</sup> Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” <sup>58</sup>

They know Jesus is in his thirties and yet claims a personal acquaintance with Abraham. Jesus doesn't back away from the statement. Instead, He brings it to a resounding climax.

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

There is no mistaking what Jesus means here. He uses some words that you don't use in normal speech. Greek often includes words like I, we, you, he she, inside the verb, so you don't need to say them. But here, the Greek word for I, ego, is used alongside the verb that means I am. Together, it is undeniably using the words God used to identify Himself to Moses: I AM that I AM. Jesus is not merely saying, before Abraham lived, I was. Jesus says, before Abraham existed, I AM. I have always been. I am the eternal one. I am Jehovah. This is the strongest claim to deity Jesus makes in all the Gospels.

Well, they did not misunderstand what He meant at all.

<sup>59</sup> Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (John 8:33–59)

They wanted to stone Him, because they were sure He was a mere man, and a deceiver at that. For Him to claim deity had to be blasphemy, and they took up stones to kill him. But again, either through a miracle, or through providence, Jesus escapes. It is not yet His time. Of course, it is ironic that children of the devil's family would have problem with someone being god, wasn't that Satan's promise to Adam and Eve – you shall be as gods. But this is the real problem in Satan's family. They are fine with you being a son of God, and Jesus being a son of God, and all of us being children of God and little gods. What Satan cannot stand is the right of the Son of God to rule the

universe as God's anointed King. He hates the Son, and so do his children.

But God's children love God's Son.

<sup>1</sup> Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. (1 John 5:1)

<sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (John 14:21)

<sup>27</sup> for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. (John 16:27)

As John told us at the very beginning of the book how we enter God's family.

<sup>11</sup> He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11–13)

You see, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Jesus, whom we saw in chapter 5 is equal with God, and yet distinct from His Father, how does He act toward God's will, God's Word, and even His own status?

Jesus freely does the Father's will. Jesus not only retains the Word, He is the Word. And Jesus humbly accepts His status as the true Son of God, as the I AM. Now He is the firstborn, and God's children are the little siblings of Him. So before assuming that we are in God's family, we compare ourselves with the one known, definite Son of God. We ask, what is my approach to God's will? Am I free from having only my own will? We ask, what is my experience of God's Word? Does it lodge in me, as precious words? And what is my attitude towards the Firstborn? Do I acknowledge Him to be the Son, the eternal God, the I AM? That's when there is a family resemblance. That's when you can say about yourself and God, like father, like son, like father, like daughter.