

Children of God & Children of the Devil
John 8:37-47

Heritage

Parenting issues are of a keen interest to me because of the centrality of the family to a healthy church and society. I once had a discussion with a man who told me that he became convinced that the character of a person was largely due to genetics after raising an adopted child alongside his biologically descended children. His blood related children became quite decent adults, but the adopted child got into trouble. While his conclusion is quite a leap given his limited experience and failure to account for the many other factors that would affect an adopted child, there is one sense in which I whole heartedly agree with him. There is a genetic issue that directly affects human character. Every one of us is a descendant of Adam and has inherited his sin nature!

Genetic determinism is the idea that the character of an individual is a consequence of genetic composition. Evil parents pass on bad genes to produce evil offspring and good parents pass on good genes to produce good offspring. According to the ideas of genetic determinism, if a society can separate the evil people from the good, then that society will become good. England did that in the 18th century and banished those convicted of crimes to the penal colony of Georgia and then to Australia after the American Revolution. The effort failed. England continued to produce both civil people and criminals and Georgia and Australia did the same.

The idea that a genetic or a parental heritage is deterministic was also present at the time of Christ. In our study of John 8 this morning, we are going to see Jesus confront some of the Jews who placed their pride and hope in their heritage as descendants of Abraham. They were convinced that their destiny was determined by this. They were good people and would go to heaven because Abraham was their ancestor. But before we go any father, be warned that a similar idea is prevalent among Christians. They believe that they are good people and are okay with God simply because they were raised in a “Christian” home.

This is something I have frequently noticed, especially in the “Bible belt” where the Christian subculture is still dominant. People can go to church and do good things and think themselves to be fine upstanding Christians, yet, too often it does not take long in talking with them to find they are void of a personal relationship with the living God. They are living on second and third hand faith, and that is tragic. Can there be anything worse than to think you have served Christ throughout your life and then hear Jesus say, as He does in Matthew 7:23, “*I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.*” What Jesus says to these Jews in this morning’s text has direct application in our own time.

Context

Turn to John 8. It is just after the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. Jesus has made several proclamations during this feast concerning His deity and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Many of the religious leaders have rejected Jesus as the Christ and had become very antagonistic toward Him even to the extreme of seeking His arrest for the purpose of putting Him to death (7:25, 44-45). Others have also rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but are less antagonistic (7:41-42). Still others are wondering about Jesus’ identity with some believing He could be the promised Messiah (7:40). It is to a group of these people that Jesus is specifically speaking starting in 8:31.

Though they had come to a certain level of belief in Jesus, He challenges that belief. Jesus is not going to allow them to entertain the idea of His being a political messiah. Jesus came to free them from sin, not Roman oppression, so He calls them to discipleship.

John 8:31, *Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, [then] you are truly disciples of Mine;³² and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. "³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?"*

Jesus had already stated that unless they believed that He was the Messiah, they would die in their sins (8:24), so they should have had some understanding of what He was talking about. It is hard to believe they could ignore their current political oppression under Rome and had forgotten their history which included being enslaved by other nations. The feast they had just completed was in celebration of being freed from slavery in Egypt. It is probable that they understood that Jesus was not referring to some sort of political freedom, but rather to some type of spiritual freedom.

Their contention with Jesus' statement is that they did not recognize themselves to be in any sort of bondage from which to be freed. As descendants of Abraham, they saw themselves as heirs to his spiritual freedom and relationship with God and not in spiritual bondage as were the pagan nations that surrounded them. They considered themselves to be spiritually free. They failed to recognize the bondage of their own sinfulness, which Jesus directly points out to them in verse 34.

John 8:34, *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. If you sin, you are its slave. Paul states this directly in Romans 6:16, Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone [as] slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"*

If you have broken any of God's commands, then you are committing sin and you are its slave. These people should have been well aware of their sinfulness because of their knowledge of God's law, but they were not. The same is often true today even with those that grow up in a church and have had constant exposure to God's word. People tend to either ignore their personal sin or compare themselves with others and think themselves to be okay since they have not committed serious sins such as murder, adultery or grand theft. Since they do not lie, steal, dishonor their parents, take the Lord's name in vain, etc., as much as others, they must be good. Others simply rely on their Christian heritage and do not think much about their personal sin. Besides, they think they are okay with God because they do more good stuff than bad stuff.

Jesus went on to point out to these Jews that they could not rely on their heritage. John 8:35, *"And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever."³⁶ "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.*

Since they are slaves to sin, then they should not expect to enjoy the benefits of being in God's house forever. It is the son that inherits, not the slave. The slave has no such right. But if the Son sets you free from sin, then there is true freedom. As stated in John 1:12, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, [even] to those who believe in His name.* If the son sets you free, you become an adopted child of God, and you remain in the house as an heir.

In John 8:37-38 Jesus contrasts their heritage as physical descendants of Abraham with their actions. The insinuation is that they are not following the heritage they received.

Brief Belief - John 8:37 - 39

John 8:37 (NASB) *"I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you."³⁸ "I speak the things which I have seen with [My] Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from [your] father."*

The emphasis in verse 38 is the contrast between what Jesus was speaking and what they were doing. Jesus was revealing what He had seen with the Father. They were not receiving His word and therefore would continue in their effort to find a way to kill Jesus. They were doing what they were hearing from their father. The direct point, which they did understand, is that there was a great contrast between Jesus' Father and their father. They were listening to and doing what their father told them and

not what Jesus was revealing to them that His Father was saying. Jesus does not directly state who their father is at this point, but it would soon become apparent.

Some claim these people could not be *“those Jews who had believed in Him”* mentioned in verse 31, but this is the only group in the near context to which the “they” of verse 33 can refer. While I believe the Pharisees would have quickly joined in their challenge of Jesus, and Jesus’ statement that they were already seeking to kill Him would suggest they had already done so, there is no place in the text in which any other group is introduced or addressed. The problem is not in the text or English translation. The difficulty is that this text exposes a very short lived belief in Jesus that was not saving faith. Some came to a belief in Jesus as He was speaking, but that belief proved to be only a momentary mental assent. They continued to believe in Jesus only until He challenged them to abide in His word so that they would be true disciples, know the truth and be set free. The transition here is not from one group to another, but the attitude of one group from accepting Jesus as the Messiah at one moment to an utter rejection of Him only minutes later. Brief belief is a fickle faith that sinks salvation and heads to hell.

In verse 39 they respond defensively, *They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.”* They mean this in both the physical and spiritual sense. They had already stated that they were not enslaved because they were Abraham’s descendants. They resent Jesus’ insinuation that they have a different father.

Note that they make no denial of Jesus’ accusation that they were seeking to kill Him. The quickest way for them to have countered Jesus’ statements against them was to assert that it was not true. But Jesus does know the hearts of men and it was true.

How fickle people are. The same ones that applaud you one moment can turn against you the next. Any one that takes on a position of leadership or gains public attention will experience this sooner or later. You can see it in the crowds at sporting events. I saw it happen at a concert at the Hollywood Bowl once. The people applauded and cheered the conductor resulting in two encores, but when the conductor finally walked off the stage without performing a third encore, the people booed him.

It should not surprise us that people who at one moment were attracted to Jesus and started to believe in Him could very quickly change and become so antagonistic toward Him that they would seek to kill him. The crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of *“Hosanna”* were shouting *“Crucify Him”* only five days later.

Abraham’s Children - John 8:39-41

Jesus responds even more directly in verse 39 but without yet telling them who their father is. *Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.”⁴⁰ “But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.”⁴¹ “You are doing the deeds of your father.”*

This is the same argument that Jesus made in verses 37- 38, but now He is more direct. They were indeed physical descendants of Abraham, but they were not spiritual descendants. They were not doing the deeds Abraham did, but they are doing the deeds of a different father. Jesus had told them the truth from God the Father, yet they were still seeking to kill Him.

They are extremely offended at this and respond with accusation and an even greater claim in verse 41. *They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, [even] God.”* This is a denial of Jesus’ insinuation that there was a question as to identity of their father given with their own insinuation about the questionable identity of Jesus’ father. A common response of people who are caught by truth is to attack their opponent. They are accusing Jesus of being illegitimate while claiming God as their Father. Later Jewish writings would commonly slander Jesus as the bastard son of Mary.

Their True Father - John 8:42-47

Jesus responds with a direct challenge to their claim to have God as their Father and then asserts His

own origin in Him. *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.*

Jesus statement is a clear contrast between their claim and the reality. They claimed God as their Father, but if that claim were true they would love the One whom the Father had sent, and they did not. Jesus makes His own origin from God very clear.

First, Jesus proceeded forth from God. This speaks of His divine nature in the incarnation. Mary was His mother, but He had no human father. He did not proceed from a man, but from God the Father Himself. Second, Jesus came from God the Father. This speaks to His mission as the Messiah. As Jesus Himself said, *"I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me."* Jesus had already made this point many times in the previous few days. John 7:16 - *"My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."* John 7:28 - *"I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me . . ."* John 7:33 - *"For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me."* John 8:18 - *"I am He who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."* John 8:26 - *"He who sent Me is true."* John 8:29 - *"He who sent Me is with Me."*

Jesus goes on in verse 43 to tell them why they did not understand and love Him. *"Why do you not understand what I am saying? [It is] because you cannot hear My word.*

Jesus was not talking about physical hearing, but the spiritual understanding and accepting of what He was saying. It was as the prophets had predicted. These people would not heed what the Messiah would tell them. That was why Jesus spoke in parables to them. Jesus explained this in Matthew 13:13-15, ¹³ *"Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* ¹⁴ *"And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;'"* ¹⁵ *For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.'*

Jesus confronts them very directly in verse 44 with the identity of their true spiritual father, *"You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [nature;] for he is a liar, and the father of lies.*

They were physically the descendants of Abraham, but they were spiritually the children of the devil. Their desires were not those of Abraham. Their deeds were not those of God. They were of Satan and demonstrated his qualities including two which Jesus specifically pointed out here - murder and lying. Murder, because they were seeking to kill Jesus. Lying, because that was characteristic of their own lives. They rejected the truth and believed their own lies. Jesus points this out further in verse 45-47.

⁴⁵ *"But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me."* ⁴⁶ *"Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?"* ⁴⁷ *"He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear [them,] because you are not of God."*

Jesus opened the door for them to counter His argument very easily in theory. All they had to do was demonstrate that Jesus was a sinner and that would make all that He said suspect. But they could not take advantage of the opportunity because what Jesus said was true and He was not a sinner. Throughout the rest of the chapter they make no charge of sin against Jesus, yet that should have been simple to do if their own claims were true. Jesus had accused them of seeking to kill him, something a godly person would not do. All they had to do was refute the charge and Jesus would be a liar. But the charge was true.

This only added to Jesus' assertion that they were of the devil. They were seeking to murder Him in accordance with the devil's desire and they were liars just like the devil. They had no interest in the truth. If they were of God they would hear Jesus' words for what they were - the truth. They did not accept His words because they were not from God.

The antagonism between Jesus and these Jews increases throughout the rest of this chapter. We will look at that next week including Jesus' great claim to deity that occurs in verse 58. But before we go on, we need to make sure we understand and apply what Jesus has said here to our own lives.

True Belief

The sad truth is that many people today that claim to be Christians are just like these Jews. Their belief is deficient and their claims are not true. Some will eventually figure that out during their lifetime. Others will not know until Jesus turns them away after they die. The reason is a prevailing false idea about what it means to "believe" in Jesus. Many equate belief with salvation without qualification. They fail to understand the nature of saving faith.

Jesus is clear that salvation is based in God's grace given to those who have faith, that is, "believe" in Him. Jesus said in 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."* Similar statements are made throughout the Scriptures. Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 is one of the more defining passages. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast."*

However, belief is not saving faith unless it has these three qualities. 1) It is in the true Christ and not a false idea of Him as exists in the cults. 2) It is in His work of atonement as sufficient for salvation in contrast to Roman Catholicism and other religions that add works of some sort to gain salvation. 3) It is an abiding faith that causes the individual to obey Jesus.

Those who believe in Jesus for a short time and later turn against Him are properly called apostates, and the scriptures warn about apostasy in many places (Matthew 24:24; 2 Peter 2:20; Jude, etc.). This warning is given in 1 John 2:18-19, *"Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not [really] of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but [they went out,] in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."* Those with true faith in Jesus abide in Him, that is, their belief in Jesus will remain even when shaken by testing (James 1:2-4). The antagonism between Jesus and these Jews began when He called them to have that kind of faith in verses 31-32, *"If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Saving faith in Jesus Christ also results in the individual seeking a new way of life in which they obey Jesus. That was Jesus' message to Nicodemus in John 3. Those who believe are saved by God and that salvation becomes evident in their seeking after the light as contrasted with those who continue in disbelief evidence by their evil deeds and avoidance of the light. That is John the Baptist's summary statement about salvation from sin in John 3:36, *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

An individual with saving faith in Jesus Christ will be adopted as God's child (Romans 8:15; Galatians 3:26, etc.). An individual without such faith remains a child of the devil. There are children of God and there children of the devil. Jesus contrasts the two here in John 8 by comparing these actions of these Jews to the deeds of Abraham (vs. 39-40). What then is the difference between the two?

Children of God & Children of the Devil

The children of God follow the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful. Abraham was far from perfect, but his life was marked by a continuing faith in God and His promises to him.

Abraham was given a promise by God in Genesis 12:1-3 to inherit a different land. Abraham immediately believed and acted upon that promise (vs. 4) and left for that land. In Genesis 17 God established a covenant with Abraham with circumcision as its sign. Abraham immediately obeyed. In the first part of Genesis 18, when the Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham, he immediately received

them. In the second part of Genesis 18, Abraham seeks to preserve life and intercedes with the Lord on behalf of Sodom. In faith, Abraham believed God's promise of a son and then in Genesis 22 when the Lord calls on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise, Abraham immediately seeks to obey believing, as Hebrews 11:19 states, that God is able to raise even from the dead.

The children of the devil follow the example of the devil. They do not believe the truth and so they do not act upon it. They hear the promises of God and reject them relying upon their own schemes instead. They believe their own lies instead of the truth. They do not seek to preserve life, but are willing to murder those who get in the way of their plans.

The apostle John took this lesson Jesus gave here to heart and expanded on it in his first Epistle. In 1 John 3 the apostle marvels at God's love which brought about our adoption as His children through Jesus Christ. *See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and [such] we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.³ And everyone who has this hope [fixed] on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Stop there for a second for this is key to understanding what John will say in verses 4-10. The true believer in Jesus Christ is a child of God and by that has a changed nature. He also has a new hope in Christ's return and because of that belief he strives to be pure. That is the process of sanctification. The Christian will sin, but will no longer be characterized by sin. What John says in the rest of this passage is the contrast between being characterized by sin or purifying oneself in a righteous walk with Christ.

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.⁵ And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

The importance of love is so central to John that he goes on to explain that those who lack love and hate their brothers are murderers, which is in keeping with Jesus' statements in Matthew 5:21-22.

Conclusions

The conclusion is this. There are children of God and there are children of the devil. The children of God have an abiding faith in Jesus Christ and have lives that are marked by obedience to Christ. They are striving to purify themselves even and Jesus Himself is pure.

There are children of the devil. Some are very obvious, but others have deceived themselves. They may appear to be good people, for the devil himself is a deceiver and appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:4), but they choose their own way instead of God's. Some think they belong to God and may even claim to be Christians, but their faith is in something other than Christ Himself. It is often their heritage or their own works of self-righteousness. Claimed faith in Jesus does not hold up when tested, and they are not characterized by obedience to Christ.

Whose child are you? If you belong to God the Father, praise Him for His mercy and grace to you. If you do not, then seek Him out for Jesus said in John 6:37, *"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."* Talk with myself or any of our church leaders and we would be happy to answer your questions and show you how to place your faith in Jesus Christ. I pray that no one here will be deceiving themselves into thinking they are something they are not. These Jews did that and it became an eternal tragedy.

Sermon Notes - 10/30/2016

Children of God & Children of the Devil - John 8:37-47

Heritage

Genetic determinism is the idea that the character of an individual is a consequence of _____ composition
This idea was common among Jews at the time of Christ - claiming to be _____ as Abraham's descendants
"Christians" can fall into the same trap of thinking they _____ righteousness from their parents

Context - John 7 & 8

Jesus' teaching has caused people to wonder about His _____ with some believing His claims
John 8:31-23, Jesus _____ them to abide in His word, be true disciples, know the truth and be set free
John 8:33, They _____ the need to become free claiming as Abraham's offspring they were not enslaved
John 8:34, If you break any of God's commands, you are committing sin and you are its _____
John 8:35-36, they were _____ of sin, but the Son could be set them free

Brief Belief - John 8:37-39

Their claim was _____ by their actions, but in keeping with the teaching of their father
The Pharisees were present, but Jesus was speaking to "those Jews who had _____ in Him" (vs. 31)
The brief belief of _____ is a fickle faith that sinks salvation and heads to hell
John 8:39 - they again _____ Abraham as their father, but make no denial of Jesus' accusation against them
People can be very _____ - those who applaud you one moment can turn against you in a moment

Abraham's Children - John 8:39-41

Jesus is more direct that their _____ did not match those of Abraham, but of a different father
They call into question the identity of Jesus' father while claiming _____ to be their Father
It is common for those caught by truth to respond by _____ their opponent
John 8:42, Jesus makes a clear _____ between their false claim and reality
Jesus proceeds forth from God the Father - signifying His divine _____
Jesus comes from God - signifying His divine _____ as Messiah to reveal the Father to mankind
Jesus was sent by God: John 7:16, 28, 33, 8:16, 26, 29, 42
John 8:43, they were spiritually _____ to what Jesus was teaching
Matthew 13:13-15, Isaiah's prophecy was being _____
John 8:44, Jesus is direct that their true spiritual father is the _____ for they were following his desires
John 8:45-46, They _____ meet Jesus' challenge to convict Him of sin
Like the devil, they had no interest in the _____, and the antagonism would get worse

True Belief

Salvation is based on God's _____ given to those who have faith - John 5:24, Ephesians 2:8-9, etc.

1) Saving faith must be the _____ Jesus Christ of the Scriptures

2) Saving faith must be in Jesus' work of atonement as _____

3) Saving faith is an _____ faith that causes the individual to obey Jesus

To believe and then turn away is _____ - warnings include: Matt. 24:24; 2 Pet. 2:20; Jude; 1 John 2:18-19

Saving faith results in the individual seeking a _____ of life in following / obeying Jesus - John 3

Those with saving faith are _____ into God's family, everyone else remains a child of the devil

Children of God & Children of the Devil

Children of God follow _____ example - an imperfect man with a continuing faith in God

Children of the devil follow _____ example - they reject the truth for the lies they want to believe

1 John 3:1-10. True belief in Jesus results in a changed _____ with a new hope and quest in life

Children of God are marked by _____ while children of the devil are marked by hatred

Conclusions

Children of God have an _____ faith in Jesus Christ and have lives that are marked by obedience to Him

Children of the devil, obvious or not, are characterized by choosing their _____ instead of God's

Do not be self-deceived, these Jews did that and have become an _____ tragedy

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the word "belief" or "faith" is said. 2) Discuss with your parents the nature of true belief in Jesus. What demonstrates your belief?

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Does genetic heritage determine character? What are the fallacies of genetic determinism? What events preceded the dialogue of today's passage? What does the truth free you from? How does the Son set a person free? Who, specifically, is Jesus talking to throughout this passage? Why does their attitude change so drastically? What is the significance that they do not deny Jesus' accusation of seeking to kill Him? How have you seen people be fickle? Have you ever been fickle? Why did they make it a point to say they "were not born of fornication"? What does Jesus claim about His own origin? About His purpose on earth? Why couldn't they understand Jesus' claims? What two characteristics of the devil were they displaying? Why were they so self-deceived? Does that still happen today? What is the basis for salvation? What are the characteristics of truth faith in Jesus? What characterizes an apostate? What were some of the deeds of Abraham that demonstrated his faith? What characterizes a child of the devil? What characterizes a child of God? Whose child are you? What characteristics in your life demonstrate who your father is? Do you hear the words of God?