

John 8:31-59
August 17, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What are the potential dangers of misplaced pride in one's heritage or religious background?
[Let people engage – false sense of spiritual security]

Transition: I think we all know that there are people today who have a false assurance of their salvation because of their religious background. When we think of Jewish people today, they believe they are chosen – apart from Jesus – because of their physical lineage to Abraham. Jesus is going to underscore this in today's passage. Jesus acknowledges in v.38 "I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me." Then a few verses later he reminds them that "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you're trying to kill me."

Who's your daddy?! We each had an earthly father, but all of us as believers have the same Father. Isn't that cool?! Let's read the text to see how Jesus deals with religious leaders who don't realize who their spiritual father really is. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Children of Abraham

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father."

³⁹ "Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the things your own father does."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

The Children of the Devil

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove

me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷ He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

The Claims of Jesus About Himself

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

⁴⁹ "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

⁵² At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

⁵⁴ Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵ Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

⁵⁸ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Whose child are you? Is God your Father because you have received Jesus Christ into your life? (John 1:12–13) Or is Satan your father because you are depending on a counterfeit righteousness, a "works righteousness," not the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ? If God is your Father, then heaven is your home. If He is not your Father, then hell is your destiny. It is truly a matter of life or death!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 322-323). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Freedom and Bondage (John 8:31–47)

What listeners are represented by the pronoun “they” in John 8:33? In the previous verses, Jesus addressed the “believers” mentioned in John 8:30, and He warned them that continuance in the Word—discipleship—was proof of true salvation. When we obey His Word, we grow in spiritual knowledge; and as we grow in spiritual knowledge, we grow in freedom from sin. Life leads to learning, and learning leads to liberty.

It is not likely that the pronoun *they* refers to these new believers, for they would probably not argue with their Savior! If John 8:37 is any guide, “they” probably refers to the same unbelieving Jewish leaders who had opposed Jesus throughout this conversation (John 8:13, 19, 22, 25). As before, they did not understand His message. Jesus was speaking about true spiritual freedom, freedom from sin, but they were thinking about political freedom.

Their claim that Abraham’s descendants had never been in bondage was certainly a false one that was refuted by the very record in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Jews had been enslaved by seven mighty nations, as recorded in the Book of Judges. The ten Northern tribes had been carried away captive by Assyria, and the two Southern tribes had gone into seventy years of captivity in Babylon. And at that very hour, the Jews were under the iron heel of Rome! How difficult it is for proud religious people to admit their failings and their needs!

Jesus explained that the difference between spiritual freedom and bondage is a matter of whether one is a son or a servant. The servant may live in the house, but he is not a part of the family; and he cannot be guaranteed a future. (Jesus may have had Isaac and Ishmael in mind here; see Gen. 21.) “Whosoever keeps on practicing sin [literal translation] is the servant of sin.” These religious leaders would not only *die* in their sins (John 8:21, 24), but they were right then *living* in bondage to sin!

How can slaves of sin be set free? Only by the Son. How does He do it? Through the power of His Word. Note the emphasis on the Word in John 8:38–47, and He had already told them, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). They would not “make room” for His Word in their hearts.

In the rest of this section, you see the debate centering around the word *father*. Jesus identified Himself with the Father in heaven, but He identified them with the father from hell, Satan. Of course, the Jews claimed Abraham as their father (Luke 3:8ff), but Jesus made a careful distinction between “Abraham’s seed” (physical descendants) and “Abraham’s children” (spiritual descendants because of personal faith; Gal. 3:6–14).

These Jewish leaders, who claimed to belong to Abraham, were very unlike Abraham. For one thing, they wanted to kill Jesus; Abraham was the “friend of God” and fellowshiped with Him in love (Isa. 41:8). Abraham listened to God’s truth and obeyed it, but these religious leaders rejected the truth.

Nature is determined by birth, and birth is determined by paternity. If God is your Father, then you share God's nature (2 Peter 1:1–4); but if Satan is your father, then you share in his evil nature. Our Lord did not say that *every* lost sinner is a “child of the devil,” though every lost sinner is certainly a child of wrath and disobedience (Eph. 2:1–3). Both here and in the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24–32, 36–43), Jesus said that the Pharisees and other “counterfeit” believers were the children of the devil. Satan is an imitator (2 Cor. 11:13–15), and he gives his children a false righteousness that can never gain them entrance into heaven (Rom. 10:1–4).

What were the characteristics of these religious leaders who belonged to the devil? For one thing, they rejected the truth (John 8:40) and tried to kill Jesus because He spoke the truth. They did not love God (John 8:42) nor could they understand what Jesus taught (John 8:43, 47). Satan's children may be well versed in their religious traditions, but they have no understanding of the Word of God.

Satan is a liar and a murderer. He lied to our first parents (“Yea, hath God said?”) and engineered their deaths. Cain was a child of the devil (1 John 3:12), for he was both a liar and a murderer. He killed his brother Abel and then lied about it (Gen. 4). Is it any wonder that these religious leaders lied about Jesus, hired false witnesses, and then had Him killed?

The worst bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. The Pharisees and other religious leaders thought that they were free, but they were actually enslaved in terrible spiritual bondage to sin and Satan. They would not face the truth, and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free.

Honor and Dishonor (John 8:48–59)

The leaders could not refute our Lord's statements, so they attacked His person. Some students think that the leaders' statement in John 8:41—“We are not born of fornication”—was a slur on our Lord's own birth and character. After all, Mary was with child before she and Joseph were married. But the personal attacks in John 8:48 are quite obvious. For a Jew to be called a Samaritan was the grossest of insults, and then to be called a demon-possessed person only added further insult.

Note that Jesus did not even dignify the racial slur with an answer. (No doubt there was also in this the suggestion that, like the Samaritans, Jesus was a heretic.) They were dishonoring Him, but He was honoring the Father. You will recall that He made it clear that it was impossible to honor the Father without honoring the Son (John 5:23). They were seeking their own glory (see John 5:41–44), but He was seeking the glory that belongs to God alone. Tradition-centered religion, without Christ, is often a “mutual admiration society” for people who want the praise of men.

Jesus had warned them that they would die in their sins because of their unbelief, and now He invited them to trust His Word and “never see death” (John 8:51). He had said this before in His synagogue sermon (John 6:39–40, 44, 54). Once again, the leaders lacked the spiritual insight to understand what He was saying. Abraham was dead, yet he was a godly man; and the faithful

prophets were also dead. This kind of talk only convinced them the more that He had a demon! (John 7:20)

By claiming to be the Lord of death, He was claiming to be God (John 5:21–29). This was not an honor He made for Himself; the Father gave it to Him. In fact, Abraham (whom they claimed as their father) saw His day and rejoiced! Instead of rejoicing, they were revolting and trying to kill Him.

How did Abraham “see” our Lord’s day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith (Heb. 11:10, 13–16). God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord’s life and ministry, but He did give him the spiritual perception to “see” these future events. Certainly Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah in the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. He certainly saw Calvary when he offered Isaac to God (Gen. 22). In the priestly ministry of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17–24), Abraham could see the heavenly priesthood of the Lord. In the marriage of Isaac, Abraham could see a picture of the marriage of the Lamb (Gen. 24).

His statement found in John 8:58 can be translated, “Before Abraham came into being, I AM.” Again, this was another affirmation of His divine sonship; and the Jewish leaders received it as such. He had once again made Himself equal with God (John 5:18), and this was the sin of blasphemy, worthy of death (Lev. 24:16). Jesus was divinely protected and simply walked away. His hour had not yet come. We cannot help but admire His courage as He presented the truth and invited blind religious men to trust Him and be set free.

The most difficult people to win to the Savior are those who do not realize that they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion to save them. They are walking in the darkness and not following the light of life. They are sharing a “living death” because of their bondage to sin; and, in spite of their religious deeds, they are dishonoring the Father and the Son. These are the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and Jesus called them the children of the devil.

Whose child are you? Is God your Father because you have received Jesus Christ into your life? (John 1:12–13) Or is Satan your father because you are depending on a counterfeit righteousness, a “works righteousness,” not the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ? If God is your Father, then heaven is your home. If He is not your Father, then hell is your destiny. It is truly a matter of life or death!

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 304-307) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

8:31–32. **Jews who had believed Him** indicates that some paid attention to Jesus’ words without necessarily committing themselves to Him personally (cf. 6:53). It was possible to “believe” in the message of repentance and the coming kingdom without being born again. Continuing in the truth is the sign of true followers and learners (**disciples**). **If** they really grasped His message, they would find salvation **truth**. Knowing this salvation truth would liberate them from their bondage in sin.

8:33. Their response indicated that they had not grasped Christ's message. Even though they were under Rome, they insisted that as **Abraham's descendants** they were **free** men. How could Jesus free them when they were not **slaves**? They had no sense of their bondage to sin.

8:34. Three times in this chapter (vv. 34, 51, 58) **Jesus** said, **I tell you the truth** (cf. comments on 1:51). The very act of committing **sin** reveals that the one doing the act is under the power and authority of sin. Sin is personified as a cruel master. Paul used the same illustration (Rom. 6:15–23).

8:35. Just as Ishmael, Abraham's **slave** son, was cast out of the house (Gen. 21:8–21), so those in sin are in danger. Isaac was **a son** who belonged and therefore remained in the house. Were they like Ishmael, or Isaac? The issue was not physical genealogy but spiritual kinship.

8:36. Jesus is **the true Son** and seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). He remains in the house and is over it (Heb. 3:6). People can become truly **free** by becoming sons of God by faith in Christ, *the Son* (Gal. 3:26).

8:37. Physically the Jews of course **are** the **descendants** of Abraham. **Yet** this same crowd was seeking **to kill** Jesus, Abraham's true Son, thus showing that they were not Abraham's *spiritual* descendants (cf. Rom. 2:28–29; 9:6, 8; Gal. 3:29). They were rejecting His message (**My word**).

8:38. Jesus spoke what He had **seen in the Father's presence** (cf. v. 28). Thus His words are God's truth. But the people had no affinity for His words because they listened to *their father* (Satan; v. 44) and followed him. As yet Jesus had not identified their father, but the implication was becoming plain.

8:39. To counter the thrust of Jesus' argument, the Jews claimed **Abraham** as their spiritual **father**. But **Jesus** responded by stating that spiritual descendants of Abraham **do** what **Abraham did**, that is, they believe and obey God. They should respond in faith to the heavenly messenger and do what He says. John the Baptist had earlier warned the Jews against the danger of trusting in their Abrahamic lineage (Luke 3:8).

8:40. But they were rejecting the heavenly Messenger and seeking **to kill** the One who **told** them God's Word. **Abraham did not do** that; he was obedient to God's commands (cf. Gen. 12:1–9; 15:6; 22:1–19).

8:41. The Jews' works were different, so their **father** (cf. v. 38) must also be different. They could seek to evade Jesus' logic only by denying an illegitimate human paternity and claiming a heavenly one. In their denial, **We are not illegitimate children**, they may have been casting aspersions on Jesus' birth.

8:42. **Love** is a family affair (1 John 5:1). If the Jews really had **God** as their **Father** and really loved Him (the Gr. assumes they did not), then they **would** have loved **Jesus** because He **came from God**. Jesus again affirmed His position as God's Representative: the Father **sent** Him.

8:43. Jesus the *Logos* speaks to people, but their fundamental opposition to Him caused them to misunderstand His **language**. **Unable to hear** means a spiritual inability to respond. The rendering **what I say** is literally, “My word” (*logos*). Paul later wrote that “the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Cor. 2:14).

8:44. **The devil** is the enemy of life and **truth**. By a lie he brought spiritual and physical death to mankind (cf. Gen. 3:4, 13; 1 John 3:8, 10–15.) He still distorts truth (**there is no truth in him ... he is a liar and the father of lies**) and seeks to lead people away from God, the Source of truth and life (2 Cor. 4:4). Since these Jews wanted Jesus’ death and since they rejected the truth and embraced the lie, their family solidarity with Satan and his desires was certain. How different from having Abraham as their father!

8:45. Jesus, in contrast with them, lives in **truth** and proclaims it. Since unbelievers love darkness not light (cf. 3:19–20), and falsehood not reality, they reject Jesus.

8:46. Many accusations had been made against Jesus (cf. 7:12b, 20). But He is so committed to doing God’s will (“I always do what pleases Him” [8:29]) that it is impossible to show any connection between Jesus and sin: **Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin?** Since this is so, they should have recognized His divine origin. His second question, **Why don’t you believe Me?** is answered in the next verse.

8:47. Belonging **to God** is the basis for hearing Him. To **hear** God is **not** a matter of being able to discern audible sounds but of obeying the heavenly commands. Jesus’ hearers absolute rejection of the heavenly Word was a clear reflection **that they did not belong to God** (lit., “are not of God”).

8:48. Samaritans were a mixed race with a religion the Jews considered apostate (cf. comments on 4:4). To call Jesus **a Samaritan** was to use a term of abuse, referring to a heretic or one with a faulty worship. Their charge that Jesus was **demon-possessed** (cf. 7:20; 8:52; 10:20) suggested they thought He was mad, unclean, and evil. How ironic that after He said their father was the devil (8:44), they said He was demon-possessed!

8:49–50. Jesus’ claims were not those of a **demon-possessed** person. He was seeking not self-exaltation but the **honor** of His **Father**. Their attempt to **dishonor** Him was an attack on His Father. (Cf. Hanun’s attack on David’s messengers, which was an insult against the king; 2 Sam. 10:1–6.) When accused, Jesus did not seek to justify Himself (cf. John 8:54). He committed His case to the heavenly **Judge**, knowing that even if people judge the Son falsely, the Father will reverse their verdict and vindicate Him.

8:51. Again Jesus said, **I tell you the truth** (cf. comments on 1:51). **Keeps My Word** is another way of expressing a positive response to His revelation. (Similar expressions are “hear” His Word [5:24] and “hold” to His teaching [8:31].) It means to observe, pay attention to, or to fulfill. A person who obeys Jesus **will never see death**, that is, **he** will not be eternally separated from God (cf. 3:16; 5:24).

8:52–53. His opponents thought that He meant physical death. To **taste death** means to experience death (Heb. 2:9). So they concluded that since **Abraham** and **the prophets** had **died**, He must be insane or **demon-possessed** (cf. John 7:20; 8:48; 10:19). In Greek their first question in 8:53 expected a negative answer: “You are not **greater than our father Abraham** who died, **are You?**” The irony is that of course He is. But He had not come to proclaim His greatness.

8:54. **If** He honored Himself (cf. v. 50), His **glory** would have no value. The **Father ... is the One who** will do the work of vindication. Yet the hostile unbelievers claimed a relationship to **God**. It is obvious that they were in error. Jesus’ Father is God; their father was Satan.

8:55. In the deepest intimacy Jesus has a relationship and union with God but His enemies did not. Jesus knows (*oida*, “to know inherently or intuitively”) the Father, but they did **not know** (*ginōskō*, “to come to know by experience or observation”) **Him**. For Him to deny this would be to lie just as they were lying. Jesus did **know** the Father and obey **Him (keep His Word; cf. v. 52)**.

8:56. The unbelieving Jews were not Abraham’s descendants spiritually (v. 39). But here when Jesus referred to **your father Abraham** He meant they were physically related to him. Abraham **rejoiced** to see **My day**, that is, the messianic salvation which God promised (“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”; Gen. 12:3). Abraham by faith was granted a son Isaac, through whom the Seed (Christ) would come. How much of the messianic times God revealed to His friend Abraham is unknown. But it is clear that he knew of the coming salvation and he rejoiced in knowing about it and expecting it.

8:57. The unbelievers objected that one so young (**not yet 50 years old**) could not have **seen Abraham**. (Nothing should be inferred about Jesus’ age from this remark.) They could not understand how Abraham and Jesus could have possibly had any visual contact.

8:58. Jesus then affirmed His superiority over the prophets and Abraham. **Abraham** came into being; but when he **was born**, Jesus was already existing. **I Am** is a title of Deity (cf. Ex. 3:14; Isa. 41:4; 43:11–13; John 8:28); the Jews’ response (v. 59) showed they understood it that way. Jesus, because of His equality with God (5:18; 20:28; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9), existed from all eternity (John 1:1).

8:59. Jesus’ clear affirmation of His deity evoked a crisis. They had to decide whether He was what He claimed or was a blasphemer (cf. 5:18). Stoning was the normal punishment for this sin. The words, **but Jesus hid Himself**, could refer to a supernatural means of escape. The NIV’s **slipping away** (lit., “He went out”) implies ordinary means (cf. 5:13; 10:39; 12:36). Once again, His time had not yet come (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 476-477). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Truth That Sets Free (8:31–41)

Jesus made clear that holding to His teachings is essential in order to claim to be one of His disciples. Further, His teachings should be accepted as absolute truth. This truth, and no other,

has the power to set a person free. Many philosophies and ideologies make the claim for truth, but all truth is God's truth, and therefore all claims for truth must be judged in light of God's revealed truth and knowledge. To adhere to a false view of reality is to be held captive to ignorance. To live a life apart from God's rule is to be held captive to sin. The truth of Jesus sets individuals free from all such bondage. The Jews refused to listen to the truth of Jesus, instead insisting on clinging to their own understandings. Perhaps the most telling verse is when Jesus stated that they had "no room" for His word.

Who Is Your Father? (8:42–47)

If God was truly their Father, then they would love Him. Jesus' made clear that His origin was divine, His mission God planned, and His purpose God willed.

People cannot hear what God has to say if they do not belong to God. If people choose to listen to the evil one in terms of what is considered truth, then they close out the voice of God. The basic disposition of Satan is that of a liar, a perverter of truth, one who deceives all who will allow him to direct their lives and thoughts.

The Eternal I Am (8:48–59)

Desperate to discredit Jesus, the Jews accused Him of being a Samaritan as well as demon possessed. Jesus denied the charge and immediately resumed His charge that they were living apart from God. He added that if anyone kept His word, "he will never see death." At this the Jews were outraged. Jesus was placing Himself above even Abraham. With one voice they asked in indignation, "Who do you think you are?" Jesus responded that God glorified Him, that He knew God, and that He kept God's word. Further, Abraham "rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." This brought utter incredulity to the crowd. They challenged Him, for here Jesus—far from even the fifty-year-old mark—was claiming to have seen Abraham. Jesus gave one of the most important answers to any question posed to Him in the entire Gospel of John. " 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' " "What was Jesus saying? That He was God Himself! The only other time the phrase "I am" was used to describe someone was in Exodus 3:14, where God used that very phrase as His name. Here Jesus claimed that name for Himself. No identity statement could be clearer. Jesus claimed to be God Himself in human form. The Jews did not respond with words but picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy (see Lev. 24:16). Jesus hid Himself and slipped away from the temple grounds.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 8:31-59. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.