
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 8.31-36. John says that many began to believe in Jesus when he was talking [8.30]. Now Jesus will give them a test of faith. He says to those who were excited about his teaching, if they would remain in his teaching – in other words, if they would truly believe in him enough to follow him obediently – then they would truly be his disciples [8.31]. These true disciples would know the truth from God the Father which Jesus shares, and that truth would set them free [8.32]! The people did not immediately understand the importance of this statement, but you can. Jesus reminds everyone that we are born into slavery to sin [8.34]. The verb is a present participle, suggesting Jesus is saying that people characterized by repeated sin or continuous sin are still slaves of sin, but [as Carson notes] the practice of sin proves slavery to sin and actively works to further enslave us. Jesus offers to set us free. How can we believe that? Jesus says that the Son [of God] is the one with an eternal connection to [God the] Father [8.35], so if the Son sets you free then you really will be free [8.36]! Jesus not only enjoys inalienable rights as the unique Son of God, but exercises full authority vested in him by the Father [8.35] to free slaves. He is authorized by God the Father to give true spiritual life [1.4; 8.12], to empower us to have freedom from the power of sin [1 Peter 2.24].

We are bombarded daily with deceptions. Some come from the world, some from our flesh, and some from the work of demons. If we study how progressive sanctification [the process by which God purifies believers to be like Christ] works, we see that truth can counter these deceptions and free us to live out our true identity in Christ as redeemed [freed] people, empowered by the Holy Spirit to live righteously. This truth begins with knowledge of the gospel about who Jesus is and what he has done for us, since by faith in that gospel we can be reborn in spirit, redeemed from the power of sin, forgiven of the penalty for sin, and reinstated in relationship with God.

Reflect: If Jesus liberates us we are really free. This is not freedom to sin, it is freedom now to choose righteousness, to choose to follow Jesus, to choose to walk in the light in victory with God instead of being mired in our sins; and it will be freedom because it will please us to make this choice. How much does that describe how you feel about things? Are there specific areas of life in which you do not like choosing righteousness, or in which you repeatedly sin against God? Pray about these issues and find a spiritually mature person in the church to discuss them with you.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 8.31-43. Scholars debate how to translate the second half of 8.38. Most manuscripts say “your Father” at the end of the sentence, and many translations have, “you are doing what you have heard from your father” [as in NIV]. But some of the earliest and best manuscripts lack the “your,” and since the verb could be descriptive of their behavior or a command, some translations have, “you must do the things which you have heard from [God] the Father” [see NET]. The latter interpretation seems more likely. Later, Jesus will say to them that their father is the devil [8.41, 44], but here he is still telling them to obey his teachings, which come from God the Father.

In any case, the Jews respond by saying Abraham is their father. They were proud of being descendants of Abraham, and believed this placed them in the covenant with God and thus made them righteous. They based their hope on being the physical seed of Abraham, but even in the Hebrew scriptures [our Old Testament], physical descent was insufficient to determine if you were really an heir of Abraham in God’s kingdom. For example, Ishmael was sent away and only Isaac and his descendants entered into the covenant with God [Genesis 17.20-21]. And Jesus retorts that if they are the seed of Abraham, then they should do the deeds of Abraham [8.39]: instead of trying to kill the Messiah [8.40], they should put their faith in God’s promise of deliverance through the Messiah! Similarly, if they are children of God [8.41] then they would love Jesus [8.42].

Reflect: Many people today make the same mistakes as these people in Jesus’ day. Many think that they are going to Heaven because they were born into a Christian family, because they go [or went] to church, because they claim to be a Christian and a decent person. None of this is what matters. The only way to become saved is to put your faith in Jesus as the savior. If you have done this, you would see results: you would react like believers in the Bible, with love for Jesus, a growing desire to know him well, to obey his teachings, to follow him in every way. Can you identify people who might think they are going to Heaven but do not really know Jesus? How could you try to help them? Are there others who might really be saved, but are not living like it? How could you try to help them?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 8.43-47. Jesus says these people are children of Satan, because they live out his desires. Since they have not responded to the gospel, they continue to walk in darkness, dwelling in sin and following Satan. Satan, in the first temptation, introduced death and deception into the world, and has been known for killing and lack of integrity ever since. Those who continue to be slaves to sin are following Satan's path, rather than following Jesus. Jesus says they are unable to hear his word. The NET Bible notes say this is a reference to really listening and responding to something. They cannot accept his teaching, they refuse to grasp it, to honor and obey it. Their values, prejudices, and flawed concept of morality preclude them from accepting and remaining in Jesus' teaching. They are proving both their slavery to sin and their lack of faith. Though Jesus was sinless, providing another evidence of his identity as the Son of God and Messiah-savior, the people could not believe, because they were not God's people, even though they thought they were. As yet, they were unenlightened by God regarding the truth, so they continued to be deceived.

Reflect: You will find many people who go to church, claim to be Christians, and yet actively work against what we know to be the gospel and key doctrines of the Bible. This has always been a problem with splinter groups, from the Gnostics of the early days to today's cults like the Mormons. Perhaps most damaging today are people who are lay leaders in churches, but have theological views that diverge from what Christianity always has held to be true. They think they are God's people but are not, because they do not believe in who Jesus said he was, in his substitutionary sacrifice to reconcile us with God, or in certain other teachings of Christ. They look like Christians in a lot of ways, but stray on important beliefs. How can you protect yourself from falling under their deception? How can you know what is true and get comfortable enough with that truth to defend it? What steps should you be taking?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 8.48-51. The Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon viewed themselves as a pure race, the true descendants of Abraham. The Samaritans were a mixed breed of Jews and other races, and over time they had developed their own religion, based on Judaism but not entirely consistent with it. So Jews looked down on the Samaritans, and thus calling Jesus a Samaritan was meant as an insult. What it is supposed to mean is unclear. Perhaps that he is a heretic, perhaps that his heredity is more questionable than theirs. Of course, the real problem is that they could not abide his teaching, which was from God the Father. Jesus says if someone would keep his word, that person would never see death. We still physically die, but when we put our faith in Jesus, we begin new spiritual life right now, which physical death does not interrupt. If we physically die before Christ returns, we will go to Heaven to be with him, and then he will resurrect us into a flawless body to live eternally on the new Earth with him [6.40].

Reflect: The condition Jesus gave for not facing death was to "keep his word." It is possible this is just a reference to putting our faith in his gospel, since we know that is the path to eternal life. It also is possible that Jesus is hinting at what spiritual life looks like. Just as he said it was the one who follows him who will not walk in darkness but have the light of life [8.12], because true believers *will* follow him, so now he might be saying that it is those who obey his teachings who have eternal life, because true believers would continue to live out, believe, obey his teaching. How well does this characterize you? Perhaps you should try the confession questions available on the website, not only for an opportunity to confess, but so as to better assess your own walk with Christ.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 8.52-59. Abraham had been dead for over 2000 years at this point, so the people were mocking Jesus' claims to have known Abraham. These people were the ones who began to believe in v.30, but we can see this was mere emotion, since now they are so far from obeying Jesus that they pick up stones to kill him. They want to kill him because they understand what he is saying here, that he is Yahweh, the one true God. As we discussed last week, Jesus says ἐγώ εἰμι in Greek, I AM! thereby associating himself with Yahweh the God of the Jews, for this is how God referred to himself through various prophets in the Old Testament.

Reflect: The divinity of Christ is one of the hardest truths for people to accept. That God came to earth, that God became man, that Jesus was both God and man, that Jesus was the Son of God who is distinct from God the Father yet of the same essence and so the same God, Yahweh... all of this is hard to comprehend, difficult to swallow. Yet this is what John wrote his gospel to convince us to believe [20.31]! What aspect of this is hard for you to believe? How do you carry on in faith despite any questions or doubts? How would you explain these truths to someone else?