

November 13, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *He Who is of God*

John 8:37 – 47

In this passage, Jesus begins to zero in on the fundamental problem every one has. Up in verse 30 we read where *As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him*. And apparently these Jews were beginning to understand who He was. But Jesus knew that the kind of believing they had at that point wasn't a saving faith, because He tells them, if you really believe in Me, you will continue in My word and know the truth, and that truth will free you. And these guys are thinking, 'What is He talking about? We're not slaves of anyone! We're Abraham's children!' And Jesus responds by telling them that no, in fact they aren't free – they are enslaved by sin and they needed liberation from that slavery. The Jews had covered over the fact that they were sinners, sold into slavery with the security blanket that was their descent from Abraham. They felt that because they were the descendants of Abraham, that meant an automatic pass into the kingdom of God. It was not unlike the thought today that is common – 'We're all God's children', and they conclude that as such heaven is their default destination.

There is a strong belief among a lot of people in the universal Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. That is, God is the Father of all and that must mean we are all brothers. 'We all God's chillin'. But while we affirm the universal Creator-hood of God, because the Bible says that all people are made by Him in Acts 17:28; we also affirm the Biblical truth that He is Father *only* of those who believe in His only-begotten Son. John has already told us: *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, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*. John 1:12-13 A common human ancestry doesn't guarantee entrance into the kingdom of God. But these people were feeling secure in heritage. And Jesus sets about destroying their false sense of security.

*"I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.* John 8:37 In other words He concedes the fact that humanly speaking they come from Abraham, but just being a descendant of the Father of faith doesn't guarantee that you will have that same faith, anymore than sleeping in the garage makes you a car. They said, 'Our Father is Abraham' and Jesus says, 'Only in the sense that you have his DNA – but otherwise there is no connection beyond that. Look at your heart – you want to kill Me. Is that something Abraham would do? Is that consistent with the life of Abraham?' Just because we come from a Christian home doesn't mean that we are Christians. Just because we come from a long line of godly people doesn't imply that we are godly as well. Every generation must come to Christ personally. That is why, parents, it is so crucial to see that your primary responsibility with your children is to lead them to Christ. Saving faith is not handed down like a family heirloom. What was vibrant and living today, may be dull and lifeless tomorrow.

In the eighteenth century, America saw the outpouring of the Spirit of God in what was called the 'Great Awakening'. Great preachers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield and John Wesley saw thousands of people radically saved and converted. Whole towns came to Christ and there was a general sense of the presence of God in many communities that brought men to repentance and salvation. People were alive to the gospel and the work of missions began to explode as the reality of the gospel penetrated hearts. But I was reading a blog this week by Collin Hansen of the *Gospel Coalition*. And he tells about a visit he made to one of the churches that was on fire during that first Great Awakening:

*I don't recall which clue first warned me about the problems with this church. Books by Jesus Seminar heavyweights Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan rested near the front of the ornate sanctuary, ready to explain for visitors why Jesus' resurrection was a myth. Rainbow flags signaled this is an "open and affirming" congregation for practicing homosexuals. Perhaps it is no coincidence the church baptized only two children in the last year. Sunday attendance has never topped 100 so far in 2011, though the facility could seat far more. Even after observing all these worrisome clues, however, I was still taken aback by what I saw on the church's basement bookshelf. Not one but two copies of the New World Translation of the Bible lurked to lure in unsuspecting readers.*

*Do the church leaders not know the Jehovah's Witnesses twist God's Word to recruit for their cult? Or do these leaders just not care?...Once renowned in the Western world for uncommon devotion to Jesus Christ, Northampton now excels in queer theater. Anyone who has learned from Edwards, an unusually gifted theologian of the gospel, would be unnerved by a trip to modern-day Northampton.* The church he visited, if you've not guessed by now, was the church Jonathan Edwards pastored back in the 1700's in Northampton, Massachusetts. Salvation is not inherited or passed along by DNA. Eventually the word of God lost its place in the hearts of these people.

And Jesus tells these Jews that their problem was that His word had no place in them. The word John uses here is an interesting one. In fact it has been translated as 'There is no room **in you** for My Word'. And the Greek actually goes a bit further and implies that '**My word makes no headway in you**'. It is a word used to describe the growing of a plant, or of the flowing of water, or even of a man's investment portfolio. The Lord seems to be saying, 'You say you are Abraham's children, and yet you want to kill Me – that is because there is no room in you for My word – it is not growing, it is not flowing, My word is not increasing in You – it makes no headway'. He had just told them up in verse 31 that true disciples continue in His word – they are abiding, they are staying – they are not departing from His word.

Is the word of God making headway in you? Is it bringing light and understanding to your life? Is it growing, is it flowing and increasing? One of the first signs of spiritual decline is that the word of God loses its place in us. It isn't growing and making headway in our hearts. We lose our appetite for it and we lose interest in consulting it. **Eventually we are like the little girl who pointed to the Bible on the mantle that was never opened, and said to her mother, "Whose book is that?" Her mother replied, "Why honey, don't you know? That is God's book!" And the little girl said "Don't you think that we had better give it back to him? No one around here ever reads it."** If the word of God is making headway in us, then there will be **signs of vital interest in the word of God**. If you've ever talked to a real Huskies football fan, eventually the conversation makes it way around to Huskies football. It doesn't matter if you are talking about the Occupy Wall Street movement or the currency crisis in Greece – somehow the conversation always turns back to the purple and gold. The thing you live for is the thing that will characterize your walk and your talk.

So Jesus says, 'My word has no place in you' and He begins to show them why. *"I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."* John 8:38 In other words, **Jesus is telling them that your present condition has everything to do with your real ancestry**. He is implying, and they are not getting it yet, that they have another father. And what is true of every child is that they speak the language of their father. But the fact that they couldn't understand what Jesus was saying simply meant that they did not share the same Father.

So they respond: *They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.* John 8:38 He is saying that if they were really Abraham's children, they wouldn't be doing what they are doing. Now we have already noted that they are in one sense Abraham's descendants – he was their human ancestor. But they are not Abraham's descendants in the most important sense – as spiritual descendants. Paul tells us this in Romans 9: *For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants...That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.* Romans 9:6-8

And the telling proof that they are not children is that they are not doing what Abraham did. What did Abraham do? First of all the Bible tells us that he believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness. Paul tells us in Romans 4: *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Romans 4:3 Down in verse 56 of John here, Jesus tells the Jews, *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."* John 8:56 In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham that one day, from his line, would come the Savior, and Abraham believed God and God reckoned that faith as righteousness. And what did he believe? He put his faith in the coming Son of God, the Messiah, who would take away the sins of the world and God said 'On the basis of that faith, I count that as righteousness'. To use a good theological term, God **imputed** His righteousness to Abraham. What does imputed mean? If someone imputes a statement to me, that means they credit me for saying it – whether I did or didn't – I get the credit or I get the blame. In the same way, when Jesus says *'Abraham rejoiced to see My day'* He was saying that when Abraham rejoiced to see that Jesus was going to come and die and pay for his sins on the cross, **he was accepted on the spot** – the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him. It doesn't say that he earned it or merited righteousness somehow. That is what these Jews were trying to do – **they were trying to obligate God through practicing piety**. They were doing deeds, but they weren't the deeds of Abraham.

A lot of people think that if they try and do the right things, that God is obligated to accept them. And they get angry when He doesn't. When bad things happen to good people, it stirs them up to say, 'What have I done to deserve this?' As if God was supposed to keep tragedy from happening as long as you went to church, or helped the poor or tipped God in the offering plate. That is what these guys were thinking. Not only were they keeping the Law, they were Abraham's descendants. That should count for something. But Jesus tells them it isn't a matter of your doing, it is a matter of birth. "You want to kill Me because that is in the DNA of your real father" He says. *"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. **You are doing the deeds of your father.**" They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God."* John 8:40-41

They were beginning to get the gist of what Jesus was saying here. Jews believed that Satan was the father of Gentiles, spiritually speaking. After the return from the Babylonian captivity, in which so many Jewish people intermarried with Gentiles, it was said among them that if a person had married one of these heathens, then those who descended from them were children of Satan. And what they are saying here is 'We're not children of Satan like the idol-worshiping Gentiles – we're Jewish on both sides – we're not illegitimate – our religion is pure – there are no Baals in our temple – in fact, God is our Father'. What they were claiming here was moral superiority. They weren't the offspring of immoral relationships. And perhaps in that was a dig at Jesus' own background. After all His mother was pregnant before marriage.

But Jesus challenges their moral superiority and introduces the test: *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.* John 8:42 In other words, **you cannot call God your Father if you reject the Son whom He has sent.** You can't be the children of God and hate what came from God. Everything hinges on the Son of God. *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him.* 1 John 5:1 And what is blindingly clear here is that these God-fearing Jews hated God's Son. And what is true of them in their day is true of us in ours. You cannot say you love God and reject Jesus Christ.

There are plenty of people who like the idea of God and claim to love God. But the line in the sand is drawn when the name of His Son comes up. Jesus truly is the dividing line in history. Everything relates to Him and your destiny depends on your response to Him. Just a few years ago, the military issued a command that military chaplains could not pray in the name of Jesus. They had to use ambiguous terms like Almighty Father or Father God to avoid hurting the sensibilities of Jews or Muslims or Buddhists or others who don't recognize the Son of God. But think about it – if you say you are praying to God the Father, and yet you reject God the Son, to which father are you praying? There are only two possible answers and if you reject the Son, then God is not your father – Satan is.

But Jesus knows that these Jews still don't really get it: *"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.* John 8:43 What Jesus was saying was like a foreign language to them. He said 'You can't understand the words because you don't know the language'. When I was in Taiwan years ago, I wanted to use the washroom in a certain building but I was baffled. There was writing on the doors which I couldn't interpret because I didn't know Chinese. But they also had pictures. The only problem was that the pictures appeared to be identical stick figures and I had no idea which one was the man. Now if I knew Chinese I could read the words. The same thing was going on here. Jesus might as well have been speaking in Chinese to these people. And the implication here is that they didn't know the language of His Father because they spoke the language of their father – and their father was definitely not God.

So He spells it out for them: *"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.* John 8:44 Their homicidal desires against Him prove their lineage; just like their rejection of the truth that He has been speaking. Jesus was never shy about telling people what they needed to hear. This sounds a little harsh doesn't it? **The devil is your daddy?** Sometimes we like to soften the blow for people – take the sharp edges off. S. Lewis Johnson tells the story of an evangelist who was invited by a pastor in Reno to hold some evangelistic meetings there. And when he got into town, the minister invited him into his office and sat him down. And the minister said to him, "Now I want you to be careful about the things you say. Don't say anything about divorce, because out here in Nevada we have a lot of divorced people. And as you know, this is kind of a divorce center." "And you don't dare mention the liquor question, because some of our best paying members are in the liquor business. And a great many of our people earn their living by furnishing worldly entertainment to people who come. So be careful about that." And the poor evangelist, a simple kind of fellow, said, "Well, of whose sins may I speak then?" And the minister said, "Well go for the Paiute Indians and their sins. They never go to church anyway."

But the truth remains – unless there has been a change of status, unless we have been born again – born from above – we are not children of God, we are children of the devil. And His DNA will out. If nothing happens to change our status – we will end up looking like the devil. One of the most startling encounters I ever had was with one of my Father's acquaintances who knew him as a young man. This guy came into my office a few years ago and one of his first comments was, 'You look just like your dad'. Now my dad's a good looking guy so I wasn't too offended. But his comment bore testimony to a real truth: we all end up looking like our parents.

And what does the devil look like? He's a murderer and a liar. And I know some of you are saying, well I might be a liar but I'm no murderer. Is that so? What about 1 John 3:15 – *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*? Ever harbor any hatred in your heart? And lying. **Every sin begins with a lie.** In the garden it was the serpent who enticed Eve with a lie – 'You shall not surely die'. Sin seduces us with the lie that it will bring pleasure, not pain, joy, not sorrow. At the heart of the lie is the thought that God doesn't have our best interests at heart and He's just a killjoy, trying to ruin our day. And since the introduction of the first lie; sin entered humanity and is part of our DNA. Pastor Roger made an observation Friday morning that '**No one ever has to sit down with their children and teach them to lie**'. It just comes naturally. We do it all the time. Here are the top five lies people tell: **This hurts me more than it hurts you. I'll start my diet tomorrow. It's not the money, it's the principle. One size fits all. The check is in the mail.** By nature, the Bible tells us, we are children of wrath.

What does this mean? What this means is that without supernatural intervention, our inherited DNA will lead us straight to hell. In a little book called *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis wrote, *It is a serious thing...to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.* That is, we are all traveling toward one of two distinctly different destinies. We will either one day be, an eternal horror and corruption, like your worst nightmare, or an everlasting splendor. Your parentage will out. Whatever DNA you have in your spiritual cells will one day be revealed either to everlasting horror or everlasting joy.

And Jesus tells these people that truth and lies don't mix: *"But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.* John 8:45 In other words, because you are of your father the devil, your very thinking is fenced in by a lie so that you can't see the truth. And then He asks two questions. And to get the import of these we need to pause. First Jesus says, *"Which one of you convicts Me of sin?"* John 8:46a That is, what is it about My life that you can point to and say, 'That is sin, therefore Your claims are false and Your message is untrue'? And here we hear a natural sort of pause as Jesus asks the question and looks at His accusers and waits for an answer. Which never comes. Because there is nothing in His life that would invalidate the message. The fact that they were unable to point to any sin in His life should have proved to them He was who He said He was.

And then you hear Him say, almost pensively it seems: *If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?* John 8:46b Or 'Why would you reject Me? Why would you not come to Me? Why would you not love Me? Why would you not receive Me? Why would you remain children of Satan? And then He answers these rhetorical questions: *"He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."* John 8:47 The word **hear** means to understand, to comprehend, to perceive the sense of what is being said. And that wasn't happening with these guys. In other words, the fact that you don't hear and understand and believe what I am saying testifies to the reality that though you say you are children of God, you really aren't. These people had spent all their time and energy in doing all the things that to them spoke of devotion to God and here Jesus is telling them that they've missed it. They had trusted in their lineage and Jesus blows that out of the water. They've put their trust in their moral superiority and that argument is blown away. They trusted in what they did and put their confidence in doing all the right stuff.

What are you trusting in this morning? Are you hearing the words of God? Are they penetrating your heart? Are they making headway in your thinking? In your life? Does the word of God have a place in you? Let His word search you out this morning. Let it find a place in your heart.

*Our good and gracious Father,*

*All our mercies come through Christ, the Word of God who has designed, promised, purchased and effected them. Let Him find place in our hearts. May this living word penetrated dead and hardened hearts and awaken them to life. May it revive and inflame hearts that have grown cold through the deceitfulness of sin and lured away by suicidal desires for the temporary pleasures of this life. Let us know that to oppose Your word we oppose the only Savior that can rescue us from Your wrath. Grant O Lord that we would have ears to hear Your word and ever put our trust in You. Form and transform our hearts according to Your word, according to the image of Your Son so that we can delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*