

John 8:31-47

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. ³²And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

³³“But we are descendants of Abraham,” they said. “We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, ‘You will be set free’?”

³⁴Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. ³⁵A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. ³⁷Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there’s no room in your hearts for my message. ³⁸I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father.”

³⁹“Our father is Abraham!” they declared.

“No,” Jesus replied, “for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example. ⁴⁰Instead, you are trying to kill me because I told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham never did such a thing. ⁴¹No, you are imitating your real father.”

They replied, “We aren’t illegitimate children! God himself is our true Father.”

⁴²Jesus told them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³Why can’t you understand what I am saying? It’s because you can’t even hear me! ⁴⁴For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵So when I tell the truth, you just naturally don’t believe me! ⁴⁶Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don’t you believe me? ⁴⁷Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don’t listen because you don’t belong to God.”

Background

Jesus was teaching in the Temple courts to a mixed audience. In verses 31–32, He addressed true believers, urging them to remain faithful, and if so, they would know the truth, and the truth would set them free. This is a powerful promise for all believers. From verse 34 onward, Jesus addressed the Pharisees and self-righteous Jews, making it clear that they were not true followers, but actually aligned with the devil (v44). Despite being strict orthodox Jews, their rejection of Jesus meant they missed the truth. Even devout Jews today must accept Jesus as Messiah and Savior to be truly saved.

Teaching Points

1. Perseverance is the sign of a believer.

In verse 31, Jesus tells believing Jews that true disciples remain faithful to His teachings. This requires consistency and perseverance, a hallmark of genuine believers. In contrast,

unbelievers reject His Word and cannot accept or understand it (v37, 43). “Listening” to God’s Word means more than just hearing it audibly. You must obey it. Perseverance in this obedience is the clear sign of a believer.

2. Practicing sin is the sign of an unbeliever.

The original Greek in verse 34 refers to anyone who *continually* practices sin. Jesus went on to teach that if you practice continual sin, you’re a slave to sin and not part of God’s family (v35). Though some religious Jews claimed to be in God’s family, their ongoing sin showed otherwise. 1 John 3:6 emphasizes that while believers may stumble at times, they do not continue in habitual sin. Persistent sin is a sign of unbelief.

3. The truth will make a sinner free.

Verse 32 says, “*The truth will set you free.*” And verse 36 says, “*If the Son sets you free, you are truly free.*” This is not contradictory. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). This freedom isn’t from life’s problems, but freedom from sin. In verse 33, the unbelieving Jews wrongly claimed they were never enslaved, ignoring their history of captivity. Jesus showed He meant freedom from sin’s bondage. Anyone can be set free by Christ.

4. Sincerity will not make a sinner free.

Jesus was speaking to sincere religious Jews who believed they were both physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham. Jesus acknowledged their physical lineage but said they were not spiritual children. True spiritual children wouldn’t have been seeking to kill Jesus. Though sincere, they were mistaken, and religious sincerity alone cannot bring freedom from sin.

Application

1. Who is *your* father?

The religious Jews believed God was their Father, but Jesus said if that were true, they would love Him (v42). Jesus instead declared, “*You are the children of your father the devil.*” (v44), affirming Satan as a real spiritual being. Satan is the father of lies (v44). Those who follow him reflect his nature: rejecting truth and embracing deception.

Who is **your** father? There are only two possibilities: either God is your Father, or Satan is your father.