

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Of Descendants and Children

John 8:37-47

Intro: So far in our study in ch8, Jesus has been talking to the religious rulers about spiritual things. In the course of this discussion, Jesus had suggested that there was definitely something lacking in their lives, a lack that only He could fill. Jesus had told them that if they would abide in His word, they would know the truth and the truth would make them free. What happens when you tell someone who thinks they have it all together that they actually don't? They get defensive! That's exactly what these men did. "We're Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone." They were incredulous to this suggestion! Why would those who've never been in slavery need to be set free? Even the most miserable people get defensive at the mere suggestion that their life could be better.

Jesus then set about making a distinction between a slave and a son. His point was to show them that the freedom He was offering to them was first and foremost spiritual. It was freedom from ignorance about spiritual matters and a freedom from the power of sin that was controlling their lives. Now, in our text today, Jesus is going to make an even greater distinction; one that'll speak plainly and directly to the dire spiritual situation that these men were actually in.

37-41a- In their response in **vs33**, these religious leaders tried to counter Jesus' suggestion that they needed to be set free by claiming that everything they needed has come to them though their religious traditions. "We're Abraham's descendants..." They could trace their ancestry all the way back to Abraham and that meant they were alright. God had made promises to Abraham and his descendents in **Gen ch17** and **ch22**. They were direct physical descendents of Abraham; that meant they were blessed thru Abraham and there was nothing for them to worry about spiritually.

Their thought processes were logical; their argument was physically sound. How does Jesus respond to their reply? He responds with grace and love by making several penetrating statements that should have helped these men finally see and understand the true state of their spiritual affairs and they should help us see the same today as well.

The distinction Jesus makes here is between Abraham's descendents and Abraham's children. "Descendents" is biological: it indicates a physical relationship. "Children" is a spiritual designation that requires a spiritual relationship. The Jews as a nation were and are descendents of Abraham but only those who enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith are considered children of Abraham. Paul points this out in [Rom 9:6-8](#). Thus, Jesus readily admits that they are Abraham's descendents in a genetic sense but Abraham was clearly not their father in a spiritual sense. How did Jesus know this? What proof did He offer? These 2 distinct designations are revealed by 1 thing: conduct.

Jesus points out that there was a strange inconsistency in their lives. It was an inconsistency between what they professed to be and what they actually were. On one hand, they're professing to be religious people. Abraham was a man approved by God; he walked with God; he was praised by God. They were claiming that this was true of them. Oddly enough, as Jesus pointed out, they were trying "to kill" Him and in doing so, their conduct demonstrated that His "word had no place" in them. Neither of these facts was true of Abraham.

When messengers from heaven came to Abraham in [Gen 18](#), he received them gladly! Not only that, he received what they had to say gladly, even though the news they brought was detrimental to his nephew Lot. These genetic descendents of Abraham in [John 8](#) had rejected and were attempting to kill the One sent from heaven. To harbor murderous thoughts against someone who has delivered the truth of God is not the conduct of Abraham's children. Their rejection of Jesus and His word proved that they were not like Abraham

Let's apply this observation to our day. Remember, these men were the epitome of righteousness in Israel; yet, Jesus said His word had no place in them (among them). They had no room for it in their lives. Obviously, religious privilege does not guarantee a right attitude towards the things of God. Now, what about the person who thinks they are a Christian, even claims to be, but yet, Christian doctrine and principles make little difference in their way of life?

I'm not saying that if Jesus were on the earth physically, that they would try to kill Him. But, there is a sense in which they are trying to kill Him – by

keeping Him out of their lives. They say they are Christians, but there's no room in their life for the One who founded Christianity. They believe He lived and died, they may even believe He rose again. But it makes no difference to them personally. Nothing about their life is changed because of Jesus.

It's also true that His Word has no place in them. That's not to say that they've never heard or read the Word of God. It just means that the Word of God is not enough a part of them to affect their daily decisions. If someone does them dirty, they nurse a grudge until they can return the favor. The fact that the Lord has said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," means nothing to them. Or they come home and insult their spouse and snap at their children all because they had a bad day; while the Lord's command to "love one another" never enters into their thinking. Isn't this a strange inconsistency? This is not the way of Jesus or of those who follow Him.

Jesus goes on to explain the cause of this inconsistency. It's because of the true ancestry of these religious leaders. They claimed a natural or physical descent from Abraham, and on this level their claim was quite true. The difficulty was that their descent from Abraham was only physical; meaning it was external not internal, natural rather than spiritual. On the spiritual level (about which Jesus was concerned), their ancestry was something quite different. It was nothing other than demonic (44). Spiritually speaking, they were children of their true father, the devil.

Now, that's not to say that every lost person is a child of the devil. They are children of wrath doomed to destruction but in the fullest sense of the word, most people serve themselves and are no more interested in serving Satan than they are in serving God. These men were particularly tools of Satan in a way most people would not be. They proved it by their concerted and vicious efforts to kill the only begotten Son of God; to kill God Himself.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which all that's not of God can be traced back to Satan; it was through Satan that sin first entered the human experience. Do you sin? Do you lash out in anger against others? Do you exploit others? Put yourself first in business or in marriage and allow others to come second? If so, then in one sense at least you are demonstrating a demonic ancestry. Such things do not come from the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught this truth in a parable once, pointing out that good fruit does not come from a bad tree. It takes a good tree to produce it. Also, bad fruit does not come from a good tree. A bad tree creates it. In the same way, you can come to know the true nature of your spiritual family tree by the fruit found on it. What's the fruit of your life? How about your speech? How about your actions? It is interesting that Jesus called attention to both these areas in speaking to the Jewish rulers. For he said, making the contrast between what is of God and what is of Satan, "I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father" (v. 38). A genuine son will imitate the actions of his father. Our actions reflect our true spiritual ancestry.

41b- The religious leaders just claimed to be children of Abraham, which Jesus disputed with undeniable evidence. Did it give them pause to think about their spiritual situation? Not at all! In fact, they doubled down on their claim and declared the highest paternity possible – that God was their Father. It's Jesus' turn to lay down some solid logic.

42-43- God cannot be their Father because, if He were, they would love Jesus (which they clearly did not do). He came from God; it was the Father who sent Him to them. If God were their Father, they would love the One the Father has sent. Jesus was not on a self-originated mission, He was obedient to the Father's will. True children of God would recognize the Father's stamp on His mission and would respond favorably to it. There were very many in Israel who did but these men did not. That in itself was enough to prove that God was not their father.

It was a constant charge against them that the religious leaders did not hear Jesus' teachings. They were so wrapped up in their own religious traditions and their own preconceptions that they could not perceive the truth that Jesus was constantly giving. Those who were truly God's children would recognize their Father's message on the lips of Jesus. These men were incapable of such recognition which showed that they really didn't know the One that they claimed as their Father.

44- I'm sure this statement really helped to smooth things over with the religious leaders. It's no wonder that in just a few more verses, they are picking up stones to kill him with. Although these words stirred their indignation, they were still true. They had to be said whether these men

were offended or not. Jesus knew this would be offensive but He spoke the truth anyway. It's good that He did, not just for their sakes, but for ours as well. Couched inside this one verse is the clearest teaching about Satan in John's Gospel, in fact, in most of the New Testament.

The first thing this verse teaches us is that there is a devil - a real one because he's not a figment of human imagination, and a personal one because he is not merely some vague, abstract idea of evil. Jesus indicates this when he speaks of the devil by name and refers to him with the personal pronoun "**he**." The modern concept of a devil was manufactured over the centuries by uniformed theologians, authors of fiction and playwrights to the point that the caricature of Satan is so ridiculous, most people reject the concept of a real devil completely. But, we know there is a real, personal devil because Jesus says there is.

Next, Jesus teaches that the devil is a fallen being. He does this by showing the height from which he fell (does not stand in the truth) and the depths to which he descended (he is a liar and the father of it). Both of these points go along with the fact that "he was a murderer from the beginning." Satan's history is written in blood. He has brought great havoc on the human race. He killed Adam and Eve with sin just as surely as if he had stabbed them each in the heart. His history is also written in deceit, for he is a liar. He has no interest in or use for the truth. His first communication with humanity was a lie and he hasn't stopped lying since. He didn't just question what God had said, he flatly contradicted it, "You shall not surely die!" (**Gen 2:17**). What God says is "the truth," what Satan says is "the lie" because it contradicts "the truth."

Just as before, it's an ethical relationship that is being implied here. These men had tried to bring about the death of Jesus and they have shown that they are incapable of accepting the truth that He brought. Both of these make it plain that they were not children of God but were, in fact, children of the devil. God is the life giver and the fountain of truth. The devil is the life destroyer and the father of lies. It's not hard to see who they really take after. The apple truly doesn't fall very far from the tree. This reality sheds light on the next section.

45-47- It's precisely because Jesus is telling them the truth that they do not believe Him. Being what they were (children of the devil) it's not expected

that they would respond to the truth. On the other hand, Jesus challenges them to convict Him of some wrongdoing. Of course, they would love to do just that but strangely enough, no one takes Him up on the offer. Why? Because they can't! It's very hard to convict a person who is sinless. Yet, logic demands that if you cannot convict an individual of wrongdoing, then they must be speaking the truth and if they are speaking the truth, why would you not believe and accept what they had to say? The only logical conclusion is delivered by Jesus in vs47.

The problem these religious leaders faced was that they were member of the wrong family. They needed to be taken out of the family of Satan and placed into the family of God. How to do this? In the physical world, the only way to do this properly is to die to the one family and be born again into another. Of course, this cannot be done in the physical world, it's only a theoretical argument. But the glory of the Christian gospel is that it can be done spiritually. It is possible to be born again through the work of God's Holy Spirit on the basis of Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

Are you a new creation in Christ? Have you been born again into God's family? In ch3, Jesus spoke to a man who had every advantage that ancestry and religious tradition could bring. His name was Nicodemus. He was a Jew, a teacher, a man of influence and prestige. Yet Jesus said, "You must be born again" (3:7). This is God's work, but it comes about as a person begins to turn their back on any supposed advantage derived from their own resources and instead begins to draw near to Jesus, fully trusting Him for salvation. True children of God aren't those with an impeccable religious ancestry, but those who believe as Abraham believed and who obey as Abraham obeyed.

Abraham literally did the opposite of what these religious leaders were doing and what many people do today. These leaders were rejecting Jesus; yet Abraham ran to Him and invited Him to come into his tent. Have you invited Jesus into your life? Do you have a godly parent? Then do as they did and follow Jesus. Their faith cannot save you but it can guide you into truth; truth that is only found in Jesus Christ. Run to Him! Welcome Him, Invite Him into your life!

You'll find that He will bless you and teach you wonderful things about His will and ways, just as He taught Abraham.

What about for the Christian? This study has mainly dealt with the strange inconsistency of someone professing to be a believer while they're not and betrays that fact by their conduct. It's an even stranger inconsistency when those who really are Christians don't display Christ-like conduct. This happens often because Christians don't lose their old nature just by becoming Christians. The old nature will still assert itself; but while it is true that it happens, it still shouldn't be characteristic of the Christian's behavior. The Christian should reveal the hand of Christ in his life. 😊