

July 3rd, 2016

## RIGHTEOUS CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL

John 8:38-47

Jesus began this conversation back in v.12 by proclaiming “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The Pharisees immediately go on the attack, to which Jesus responds in v.24 “...unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” As a result of this initial sermon, v.30 says “...many *believed* in him.”

But we’ve already seen examples of false faith in John’s gospel, specifically in chapter six. So Jesus gives us a way to test the genuineness of faith, v.31 “If *you abide in my word*, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” This immediately showed the falseness of some of their faith. They were offended. Look at v.33 “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’ Why were they offended? Because Jesus stripped away their *self-reliance*, He stripped away their *moral superiority*. He was calling them to *abide in His word*, that Word that tells them they are completely helpless, and undone, and wandering in the darkness apart from Christ. **You see, Jesus is not telling us that we need to do something in order to remain his disciples, but to depend on Him doing it all.** And shockingly, this offends our sinful hearts. We all possess a dark tendency in our hearts to believe in a gospel that relies on us. We want to be the hero. The more we can rely on ourselves, the more we feed our self-worth. And so we seek after the credit like a drug. As one pastor said it, we are credit whores.

Dear congregation, this darkness belongs to all of us. My sinful heart wants the credit. It wants the spotlight. My sinful heart longs for you to tell me how good of a pastor and preacher I am, so that I can play the part of the hero. We all do it. And this disease prevents us from true freedom. “...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

The Jews in our passage today are rejecting Christ because they want to hold onto their ability to take the credit. When they lash back with their moral, and ethnic, and religious superiority, Jesus digs deeper to the very root of their problem, they are children of the devil. The reason why they reject His message is because like the devil, they want the glory. They wanted their righteousness, their honor to be on display.

But this isn't just a Jewish problem, this is a human problem. This is a Christian problem. **The drug of choice for all human beings is the drug of celebrating self.** And we protect this drug by putting on shows of self-righteousness. The Pharisees did this by making long prayers (Mark 12:40); by sounding the trumpet when they gave to the needy (Matt. 6:2); by disfiguring their faces when they were fasting (Matthew 6:16). Do we put on shows of self-righteousness? All the time. Christians, like every other human being, are the best Pharisees. Let's test ourselves: what sins do we hide from others? *Why* do we hide them? Because we don't want people to know how bad we really are. Hiding our sins proves we do not really believe the whole gospel yet. Jesus didn't come because we were just a little sick and needed some assistance. Jesus came because we were sons and daughters of Satan.<sup>1</sup>

☆The Works of the Children of God

☆The Works of the Children of the Devil

### *Doctrine*

Children of the devil cannot bear to hear the words of God nor are they able

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<sup>1</sup> And that Satanic principle, although dealt a deathblow when we become Christians, lingers and dies a slow death until we go to glory. Therefore we need to continue to abide in His gospel Word otherwise we will not be free. Meaning all principles of self-reliance come from Satan.

## I. The Works of the Children of God

### The significance of belonging to Abraham

These Jews refuse to hear Jesus' gospel, because they cannot stomach the idea that they are ruined sinners. And so everywhere they are calling into question Jesus' authority. If they can destroy His authority, they can destroy His message and hold onto their superiority. But Jesus says in v.38 "I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." Jesus basic claim here is that He and they have two different *fathers*, that is why they will not accept His message. They respond in v.39 "Abraham is our father." Abraham was the father of the whole nation of Israel. God made unbreakable promises to him that would extend to all of his descendants. The promises of eternal life and everlasting blessing depends on being one of Abrahams's descendants.

So these Jews reasoned that since they belonged to Abraham, they could reject the words of Christ. They comforted themselves in the righteousness they thought they had because Abraham's blood was in their veins. Jesus responds to this in v.39 "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did..." Being a true Jew that pleases God the Father does not reside in blood, it resides in faith and love in the Son of God. **Galatians 3:29** "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." **Romans 9:6-8** "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring...it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

Jesus already affirmed that these Jews belonged to Abraham physically in v.37, but now He is pointing out that he is not their true *spiritual* father.

### Spiritual sonship is demonstrated by likeness

Spiritual sonship (belonging) is proven by *likeness* (correspondence) between father and children. We see this in natural realm: like produces like.

Venomous snakes only produce small snakes with the same venom, they don't produce butterflies. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. Spiritual children always resemble their parents. This principle controls the rest of Jesus' speech.

### The works that belong to the children of God

Jesus makes two arguments for determining the identity of our spiritual father. 1) Jesus reasoned in v.39 If they belonged to Abraham they would be doing the works of Abraham. What was Abraham's greatest work? He believed God. **Genesis 15:6** "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." Although these Jews said they believed in God, *they did not believe in a God who supplied them with the righteousness they needed*. The only God that saves is a God who provides the righteousness that you need, and that is received through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

2) Jesus says in v.42 "If God were you Father, *you would love me*, for I came from God and I am here." Jesus is saying, 'how can you be a child of God, when you deny love to God's Son whom He sent.<sup>2</sup> You hate the very One whom He sent for you.' Belonging to God means to love Jesus Christ. Those who do not love Jesus Christ as Son of God and very God Himself, do not belong to God. **1 Corinthians 16:22** "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed."

In summary Jesus is responding to the Jews by giving two if/then statements (v.39, v.42) If Abraham or God were your father, then you would reflect their qualities. Kinship to Abraham would produce a belief in God who supplies all your righteousness. Kinship to God the Father would produce a love for Jesus Christ the Son. So now Jesus turns to the kinship they most resemble.

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 349

## II. The Works of the Children of the Devil

### Reaching for self-justification

Three times in this passage, Jesus tells the Jews they are doing the works of their father (v. 38, 41, 44). On the second occasion in v.41, the Jews respond by saying “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” At first, this seems like a super-odd response, because it seems to come out of nowhere. So how does this fit? It fits because it is another opportunity to flaunt their self righteousness. Apparently they knew Jesus was born before his earthly mom and dad were married. ‘Jesus, your mom was sexually immoral, therefore by the technical use of the term, you are a bastard. Who are you to tell us that we are spiritually ruined? We were born pure, we have one father, and that is God.’

### You are of your Father the Devil

Jesus is so direct in his response that liberal scholars have accused this part of the Scripture of being anti-semitic (prejudice/hostility against Jews). Jesus begins his answer in v. 42

“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. [43] Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. [44] *You are of your father the devil*, and your will is to do your father's desires.

The reason why this text is not anti-Jewish is because Scripture calls all who reject Christ, children of the devil, not just Jews. Jesus told a parable in Matthew 13 of a man who sowed seeds in his field. In the night his enemy came and sowed weeds. This was a parable about the kingdom of heaven. The man who sowed was Christ, the enemy was Satan, the good seeds are sons of the kingdom and the weeds, v.38, “...are the sons of the evil one,” All who reject

Christ, and not just Jews, have Satan as their father.<sup>3</sup> This agrees with with God said in the beginning. **Genesis 3:15** “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring;” All who are not of the offspring of Christ, are by necessity the offspring of that ancient serpent Satan. If you are not a born again follower of Jesus Christ, you are following that ancient serpent, and he is your father.

### **The works that belong to the children of the devil**

Now just like being a true child of Abraham would produce a likeness to Abraham, so being a true child of the devil produces a likeness to the devil. First, Jesus gives this description of the devil halfway through v. 44 “He was a murderer from the beginning...” Just as Satan murdered the entire human race by his subtle tempting of Adam and Eve, so these Jews seek to kill Christ (v.40) which if they had their way would murder the entire human race by cutting them off from the only possible redeemer. Like father, like son.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, Jesus says these Jews are just like their father the devil in the way they handle the truth. He says halfway through v.44 [He] “...does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Before Satan, there were no lies. He gave birth to them, and every child of his loves lies more than

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 3:8-10; cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Ephesians 2:2

<sup>4</sup> And this story is the main story of every news story that you see on t.v. The seed of the serpent is always reeking havoc and destruction. Yesterday the attack on that cafe in Bangladesh was the work of ISIS. Their god? The god of Islam, whose whole religious structure rests on self-righteous. Islam rejects the need of a substitute righteousness, a righteousness that we need from Christ. That is the main reason there is terrorism in the world today: ***because the world rejects the need to be covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The rejection of that doctrine is why there is war.*** **Luke 18:9** says that those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, ***treat others with contempt.*** This contempt of others takes on many different forms: Abortion, slavery, racism, terrorism, chauvinism, feminism, etc. All of these ideologies and wicked practices spring from one source: self-righteousness. When we treat others with contempt, it is because we think we are righteous in ourselves. If it's a little contempt, we hold to a little self-righteousness; if it's big contempt, we hold to a big self-righteousness. If you're honest, you ought to be dreadfully convicted at this point just like me. How often do we treat others with contempt? In your heart? In your actions? Christians are bursting with self-righteousness, which should be a clue that we Christians desperately need Christ! We don't need Christ less than unbelievers. It's not as if we come to Christ, and then we can look at our unbelieving friends and reason, “they need Christ more than I do.” Wrong! You never stop needing Christ, because on this side of glory, you never stop sinning.

the truth. Jesus says in v.43 “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot *bear* to hear my word.” Look at v.45 “But *because* I tell the truth, you do not believe me.” The very reason these men would not believe Jesus was *because* He told them the truth. If He were to tell them a lie, they would have believed Him!

### **Your will is to do your father’s desires**

The children of the devil, desire to do what the devil desires. v.44 “You are of your father the devil, and your *will* is to do your father’s *desires*.” And so we see a great agreement between all the devil and his children. Just as there is no good existing in the heart of the devil, so there is no good existing in the heart of natural man, for he is his child. The same venom that runs through that ancient serpent runs through all of his children. The devil has no love toward God or any love toward man or any other creature; so his children, all of mankind after the fall, have no love for God, and no love for man. Even the most tender mother has no sincere love for her child (Just consider Deuteronomy 28:56-57 to see how these daughters of the devil treat their own families.) In every way, sin makes us identical to the devil, except for one. The devil because he is a spirit, has *greater capacity* to evil. A young child is just as corrupted in the totality of her being as her mother, but the mother because of her developed mind and affections has a greater capacity to do more. Likewise Satan has a greater capacity than humanity.

Aside from that difference, all of mankind has a heart that is bent on doing the desires of the devil. Every thought, every affection, every action is totally perverted. Jesus allows for no other interpretation—v.44 “your will is to do your father’s desires.” As far as the totality of corruption, the devil and his children are completely the same. You and I were born devils. *If your description of a sinner cannot be at the same time describe the devil, you are not thinking about sin rightly:*

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does

good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:10-18

What one virtue does the Apostle assigned to fallen sinners? None. There is not one good thing, spiritually speaking, that a child of the devil, like you and me, have.

That is the world that Jesus Christ entered into. A world totally held captive by Satan, and a world in which every heart loved doing the things that Satan does and completely opposes the kingdom of Christ.

## Application

**Our Doctrine:** Children of the devil cannot bear to hear the words of God nor are they able

Jesus lays his final indictment in this passage by telling them that the **reason** they cannot accept Jesus’s words, is because they are not of God. Look at v. 47 “Whoever is of God *bears* the words of God.” The “hearing” that Jesus speaks of hear, means receiving and believing. He’s not simply pointing to sound waves. He’s saying ‘Whoever is of God *believes and receives* the words of God.’ So what is in view here is saving faith. Now let’s look at the rest of the verse: “The *reason* why you do not *bear them is* that you are not of God.” The sentence structure of this verse must be carefully noted. Jesus is explaining their unbelief, and there is a clear cause and a clear effect in this verse. Let me give you an example: if I were to say to you ‘the **reason** why you are hot is because it is 100 degrees outside.’ You would totally get it. But if I were to say ‘the reason why it is 100 degrees outside, is because you are hot,’ you would scratch your head. If I switch the cause and effect around I distort the meaning. Likewise consider Jesus words, He does not say “The reason why you are not of God, is because you do not hear (believe) my words.” He says the opposite. “The

reason why you do not hear (believe) them is that you are not of God.” Whoa. Becoming a Christian is not God responding to your belief, rather your belief is a response to something He has done. This is called the new birth. **John 1:12-13** “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Our faith does not cause the new birth, the new birth causes faith. ‘But that means it is totally out of my hands, and completely in God’s hands.’ Beloved that is what grace is. Grace is God’s freedom in choosing to make you one of His own or not. God’s grace aims at destroying the very thing that all of us are intoxicated with: self-righteousness. **1 Corinthians 1:28-31** “*God chose* what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, *so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus,... so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

**Our Duty:** Resist all coping mechanisms save the gospel

Beloved, you and I have to be real with each other. The sin of these Jews in this chapter is not something that goes away perfectly when we become saved. Self-righteousness is the most pervasive and most go-to sin that we will face in our entire lives. I struggle with this hourly. My sinful heart craves my goodness to be seen by men. I want approval. I want recognition. My exhaustion partly stems from trying to feed this beast. The beast of self-righteousness is never satisfied. It’s like the leech in proverbs that says “Give, give.” (Proverbs 30:15) That’s why when I received this email during my time off, it was the best medicine I needed for my break.

**Subject Line:** To my Inadequate and Illegitimate Pastor  
[excerpt]

We all struggle with accusations of inadequacy and illegitimacy. We *all* preach this to ourselves, so I know that you preach this to yourself – and the

reason you *want* to preach this to yourself is because it's true, and *deep down you know it's true*. You're not adequate as a teacher. You've only been aware of Reformed Theology but a few years. You have members of your church who have been enjoying the deep truths of Reformed Theology *much* longer than you. Your church is a mess. Despite your efforts, you don't spend enough time devoted to the preaching of the Word. You're constantly dealing with issues that take your time away from personal growth and ministry...***You are illegitimate***. You wasted away half of your life. When others were out equipping themselves for the ministry, you were worshiping at Pearl Jam concerts. By the time you came around, it should have been too late. Had there been plenty of other ministers with better qualifications, no one would have chosen you. Through a sad state of affairs, you were the only choice. You didn't take the path of seminary. Everyone else came in through the front door, and you snuck in the back. Your ordination was a rag-tag event by elders who either moved on or have left ministry. What credentials can you point to that show me I should trust you? Are there not many preachers who are more vetted? Has any respected theologian ever endorsed your ministry? No other pastor would say it out loud, but if they really knew how unprepared you were to pastor a church, perhaps the quiet whispers of the word "fraud" would come to mind. You are inadequate and illegitimate, and there is a part of your soul that wants to preach this to yourself precisely because it's *true*. And despite your best efforts to justify yourself, these accusations will haunt you because they are true, and they will be inescapable because *your very own heart* stands as your accuser.

Dear congregation, I'm far worse than simply inadequate and illegitimate, I am a former child of the devil. I have sins that would make you question your friendship with me. I am worse than this email lets on, and so are you. You are illegitimate, inadequate. And I don't have to try and convince you of these things, because that little voice already in your heart has already convinced you. That is why you put on a veneer of righteousness for others to see. That is why

you hide your sins from others and don't confess them, because if you confessed them, they would know you for who you really are and that terrifies you. You were born a child of the devil. Unlovable, and unloving.

Belonging to Jesus Christ means that we have been welcomed because of His blood and righteousness into right standing with God. When have we ever moved from the category of unrighteous in ourselves to righteous in ourselves? We never have. And yet we pretend. We invent coping mechanisms that would try to convince others that we have. Just like the Jews pointing to their ethnicity or their morality in this chapter, we can so easily do the same, because we don't want to come face to face with the fact that we are spiritual frauds. And so we find ways to show ourselves and others that we are the hero.

Perhaps some of you women clean the house extra good when company comes over. Cleanliness is good thing because it does say something about God. But do you clean for God's glory or for your own, thinking that others will think better of you. Perhaps some of you men subtly boast in the importance of your job to make others think higher of you, or conversely are ashamed to tell people of your job because you don't want others to think lowly of you. I struggle with this all the time. I'm always trying to medicate my inadequacies. My sinful nature would tell myself that the reason why we are small is because we are hard core, or being faithful or whatever. Why would my heart want to believe that? Because it doesn't want to believe the truth. I am not the hero. Anything that we would turn to to make us feel better about ourselves other than the gospel proves that we have not yet drank in the full gospel yet.

**Our Delight:** Christ died for children of the devil such as us

Jesus suffered a hurricane of hell on the cross because you and I were the most vile creatures in the universe. There is nothing more vile than children of the devil. And God would be just to hate us, and loath us, and punish us for all eternity, just as He would be just to punish our natural father the devil. But behold the love of God, that the Son of God would die for sons and daughters of

the devil. **Romans 5:8** "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is the greatest freedom to be able to say to yourself, '..yes I am as wicked as the spawn of Satan, but Christ loves me anyway. Yes I am inadequate and insufficient in myself, even now, but Christ is enough. Yes I am a fraud and by all accounts ought to be shunned by all but Christ shed His blood that I might be as white as snow. Beloved this gospel is the only gospel that will get us home. Trusting in any veneer of pretended morality, or pretended superiority is a lie. That's what children of the devil do.

What Jesus accomplished on calvary was not just to free us from bondage to sin, but bondage to false righteousness. You and I have nothing to commend ourselves to God. We didn't 10 years ago, and we won't 10 years from now. You will be just as inadequate and illegitimate 10 years from now as you are today, and Christ won't love you any less or any more. Consider the fact that you will die lacking a personal righteousness. But if you are in Christ, born again by His Holy Spirit, you have all the righteousness you need in Him. You don't have to hide. You don't have to run back to those fig leaves and blame shift. God already knows your guilty, that's why he sent Christ.

## Communion

Theme of adopting us out of the family of satan into the family of God?

**Colossians 1:13** “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,”

**Colossians 2:13-15** “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”