

# Lesson Twelve

*(John 8:31-59)*

“Faith,” as Andrew Blackwood, Jr. once wrote, “is more than accurate information about God. Faith is a personal relationship with him.” The problem with the people gathered around Jesus is that they believe in him the way people believe in Santa Claus.

## **Faith: Love and Obedience**

*(John 8:31-47)*

<sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to those who believed in him, “If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; <sup>32</sup>you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup>“We are the descendants of Abraham,” they answered, “and we have never been anybody’s slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, ‘You will be free?’”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup>A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. <sup>36</sup>If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. <sup>37</sup>I know you are Abraham’s

descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because you will not accept my teaching. <sup>38</sup>I talk about what my Father has shown me, but you do what your father has told you."

<sup>39</sup>They answered him, "Our father is Abraham."

"If you really were Abraham's children," Jesus replied, "you would do the same things that he did. <sup>40</sup>All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me. Abraham did nothing like this! <sup>41</sup>You are doing what your father did."

"God himself is the only Father we have," they answered, "and we are his true sons."

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God really were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup>Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. <sup>44</sup>You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father's desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what is natural to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. <sup>45</sup>But I tell the truth, and that is why you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup>Which one of you can prove that I am guilty of sin? If I tell the truth, then why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup>He who comes from God listens to God's words. You, however, are not from God, and that is why you will not listen."

The principle which Jesus states in 8:32 is applicable in every area of life, whether it's chemistry or cooking, psychology or physical education. Truth is the great liberating force in the progress of mankind. And 8:36 makes it clear that the "truth" which Jesus refers to is intimately connected with his own personality. So he later says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me" (14:6).

Paul Butler says, "The man who depends entirely upon human wisdom certainly cannot be free for he is imprisoned by the very limitations of human reason! That the mind of the flesh cannot possibly plumb the depths of wisdom is evident from Romans, the first chapter, and from 1 Corinthians, chapters one through three. The truth that is found in Christ gives men freedom in at least three ways: (A) Freedom from the habits and enslavements of the flesh can come only through knowledge and obedience of the truth; (B) freedom from spiritual lies, falsehoods, deceptions and prejudices which evil men use to enslave the minds and souls of men and women through their perversions of the truth; (C) freedom from sin and all its consequences — guilt, fear of death,

penalty and sentence of sin which is eternal death" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 55).

In 8:33 the crowd objects to the idea that they are in any way less than free men. So Jesus explains his remark by laying down another fundamental spiritual principle: "Everyone who sins is a slave of sin" (8:34). In other words, anyone who makes a habit of sinning is in bondage to sin. Paul tried to engrave the same principle upon the minds of the Christians at Rome, Italy: "Surely you know that when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey — either of sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in being put right with God. But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received. You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:16-18).

Does this mean that when a person becomes a Christian he will never sin? When Jesus said "everyone who sins," he used a Greek present participle (*ho poion*) which indicates an established and continuing life of sin, not just an occasional mistake. Yes, a person will sin after becoming a Christian (1 John 1:8); but he doesn't make a habit of it. The Christian is one who is continually walking in the light (1 John 1:7), with his face pointed toward heaven. And although he sometimes stumbles as he walks toward that goal, he has established a definite, spiritual pattern for his life. So John says, "We know that no child of God keeps on sinning, for the Son of God keeps him safe, and the Evil One cannot harm him" (1 John 5:18).

In 8:35 Jesus begins to talk about the family of God. He boldly confronts them with the fact that he is the Son of God while they are actually the children of the Devil (8:44). That is why they refuse his teachings and reject him as the Messiah, even to the point of trying to kill him (8:37). They claimed to be spiritual heirs of Abraham, but their actions clearly betrayed their hypocrisy. For Abraham was a man who loved, trusted, and obeyed God. When God's messengers came to him, he gladly welcomed them (Genesis 18:1-8). But these people display none of the qualities which marked Abraham as a child of God. Simply being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough (Rom. 2:28-29).

Jesus' strong denunciation of these "believing" Jews in 8:42-47 is a bitter pill for "faith only" advocates to swallow. If a person is saved at the moment he believes in Jesus, without any other

response, then he is saved without obeying Jesus' command to repent, without obeying Jesus' command to be immersed, and without loving him (8:42). The false doctrine of "faith only" would acknowledge demons as Christians (James 2:19) and accept the cowardly Jewish rulers mentioned in 12:42-43 as brothers in Christ! But Jesus himself says, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples . . ."

### Jesus and Abraham

(John 8:48-59)

<sup>48</sup>They asked Jesus, "Were we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon in you?"

<sup>49</sup>"I have no demon," Jesus answered. "I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. <sup>50</sup>I am not seeking honor for myself. But there is one who is seeking it and who judges in my favor. <sup>51</sup>I am telling you the truth: whoever obeys my teaching will never die."

<sup>52</sup>They said to him, "Now we know for sure that you have a demon! Abraham died, and the prophets died, yet you say that whoever obeys your teaching will never die. <sup>53</sup>Our father Abraham died; you do not claim to be greater than Abraham, do you? And the prophets also died. Who do you think you are?"

<sup>54</sup>Jesus answered, "If I were to honor myself, that honor would be worth nothing. The one who honors me is my Father — the very one you say is your God. <sup>55</sup>You have never known him, but I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I obey his word. <sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see the time of my coming; he saw it and was glad."

<sup>57</sup>They said to him, "You are not even fifty years old — and you have seen Abraham?"

<sup>58</sup>"I am telling you the truth," Jesus replied. "Before Abraham was born, 'I Am'."

<sup>59</sup>Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

People often try to hide their own guilt by attacking others. And that is the tactic which these "believing" Jews use here, as they accuse Jesus of being one of those heretical Samaritans and of having an evil spirit! It is difficult for us to understand how these people could be so arrogant and foolish as to accuse the Son of God of being possessed by a demon. But we know that Satan is able to blind the eyes of those who want to continue living in sin.

Jesus quickly denies their evil accusation and says, "I honor my Father, but you dishonor me" (8:49). What infamous blasphemy it is to attribute the miracles of Jesus to the power of a demon!

They commit an outrageous affront to both Jesus and God. For just as no man could insult my son without hurting my feelings, no one can reject Jesus without simultaneously insulting God the Father. Jesus said, "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (5:23).

Elsewhere Jesus warns, "If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

So these hot-headed, hypocritical people actually judge themselves unworthy of heaven by their unwarranted rejection of Jesus. That sad scene is reenacted every day in our society, as men and women choose to become disciples of the Devil rather than disciples of the Lord Jesus. Each person has the freedom to either accept or reject Jesus, and each of us will be held personally accountable for that decision.

In 8:51 Jesus speaks a truth which offers hope to the human heart: "Whoever obeys my teaching will never die." This does not mean, of course, that a Christian will never have his soul separated from his body in physical death. But Jesus does promise that those who love and obey him will not have to face the second death, that punishment of total separation from God's presence which is the destiny of those who reject Jesus and end their earthly lives out of harmony with him.

Praise God that Christians are set free from the fear of both the first and second deaths! A former Bible professor of mine, Batsell Barrett Baxter, tells about how the A.R. Holton family faced up to death: "Brother Holton preached the gospel of Christ in a most effective way for more than half a century and on several continents. His wife was his equal in every way, teaching thousands of women and young people the meaning of Christianity over a period of more than five decades. Shortly after his seventieth birthday Brother Holton spent the last day of his life in the usual way. He had taken a walk earlier in the day, had enjoyed visiting with friends and had done some reading. It was then that death came. Neighbors and friends soon arrived and found the beloved wife in complete control of her emotions. Someone spoke in an effort to offer sympathy and encouragement. Sister Holton responded, 'I am not grieved for Daddy. This is the finest day of his life — the day for which he had been preparing through all these years.' Truly, for the Christian, the hour of death is an hour of triumph."

But these Jews who are crowded around Jesus get off on the

wrong track, as usual. They scornfully remind him that even their greatest leaders — Abraham and the prophets — all died (8:52-53), so “Who do you think you are?”

Perhaps tiring of such fruitless arguments, Jesus forcefully and clearly states that God is his Father (8:55). He then climaxes his speech by saying that Abraham saw the time of his coming and “was glad” (8:56), and “Before Abraham was born, ‘I Am’ ” (8:58).

Paul Butler writes, “Jesus is contrasting the *faith* of Abraham with the *lack of faith* of these Jews who claim Abraham as their spiritual father. Here the Messiah stood before them and had done many mighty works in their very presence and they could not accept Him, yet their father Abraham had, by faith, seen the day of the Messiah. There were others, both before and after Abraham, who through eyes of faith beheld the day of Christ. Moses, it is written, “accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt . . . for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible’ (cf. Heb. 11:26-27). The prophets also saw His day (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12)” (*The Gospel of John*, II, 69).

In 8:57 the Jews try to discredit Jesus by saying that there was no way he could have seen Abraham since he is not even middle-aged yet. (The Levites were required to retire at 50 years of age, according to Numbers 4:3. And since Jesus began his ministry at about 30 years of age, he was about 33 at this time).

Not understanding who Jesus really is, the Jews react violently to his use of God’s words in Exodus 3:14. But by them Jesus affirms that he has always existed and always will (1:1-2). And he escapes from them.

### Thought Stimulators on John 8:31-59

1. How can we know if we are really disciples of Jesus?
2. In what ways has Jesus set you free?
3. What is truth?
4. Give two examples of how a person can become a “slave of sin.”
5. Why wouldn’t these people listen to Jesus?
6. Who is the father of all lies?
7. Explain John’s statement that “no child of God keeps on sinning” (1 John 5:18).
8. In what ways do people dishonor Jesus today?
9. Explain the statement: “Whoever obeys my teaching will never die.”

10. Who else do we insult when we insult Jesus?
11. What will happen to those who publicly accept Jesus?
12. What will happen to those who reject Jesus?
13. Who, besides Abraham, also saw the day of Jesus approaching?
14. Write a definition of "faith" which includes the elements of love and obedience.
15. Write a brief essay or poem on the theme, "Jesus Means Freedom."