

Unmasking Spiritual Hypocrisy – Part II
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John 8:37-47
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The title of our message is once again ‘Unmasking Spiritual Hypocrisy’. This is Part II, looking at the same text we did last week, John 8:37-47. We noted last week in the introduction that the idea of the word ‘*hypocrite*’, a Greek root which is ‘*hupokrites*’, which was used actually to speak of actors, those who pretended to be something they were not, and those who wore masks to carry off that pretense. So unmasking spiritual hypocrisy seems to be an apt metaphor for what Jesus is doing in this passage. We’ve noted in previous messages that we have in this text, in this encounter of Jesus as He’s teaching in the temple courts of Jerusalem to a large number of Jewish people who have gathered to hear Him.

We have Him apparently having great success. At first glance we think that because we’re told in Verse 30 that many of the Jews who heard Him came to believe in Him. But immediately Jesus takes this initial faith, this beginning type of faith of these people and He begins to lead them to really look deeper at their hearts. He begins to speak directly to those. In fact, Verse 31, we’re going to read it, I want to read the context. We’re going to read it in a moment, and it says that He spoke to those Jews who believed in Him. So He is specifically aiming at the people who have expressed this initial faith. What He does is He lays out for them, first in Verses 31-36, the cost of discipleship. Then after laying out the cost of discipleship, He begins to really expose, identify the marks of spiritual hypocrisy, false faith, shallow faith. It’s not really genuine faith at all. It never was genuine faith. You can’t believe in truth and stop believing. It is clear in other places but you can’t have a type of shallow faith that looks initially like truth faith, but is not in reality true faith.

So today we’re going to look at ‘Unmasking Spiritual Hypocrisy’. Before we do I want to make a brief mention of a series of messages I did on the cost of discipleship. I mentioned, I used that title from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book The Cost of Discipleship, by that name, and wanted to make a correction. I talked with the Elders about this, that Bonhoeffer’s book is a little bit of a mixed bag. There are certainly great quotes he has in books like The Cost of Discipleship, but there are also issues about exactly where he was theologically. He was influenced by German Neo-orthodoxy. Sometimes his speech, so I’m not recommending everything that he had to say. It’s even arguable that he wasn’t so much martyr as he was an enemy of Hitler trying to take Hitler out of the way. So a little bit of a

mixed bag there, but the quote that we shared two weeks ago about the costly grace and cheap grace is certainly on spot in that moment.

Now today, ‘Unmasking Spiritual Hypocrisy – Part II’. Now I’m going to read Verses 30-36, as well as 37-47 to help set the context.

John 8:30-47

30 As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.

31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?”

34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.”

*39 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. 40 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. 41 You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” 42 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. 43 Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 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. 45 But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why*

do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we ask now that You might grant to us the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the words which that same Spirit inspired here in this passage. Grant that we might see, that we might understand, that we might apply. We pray that You might search our hearts and be exalted in our lives. In Jesus' Name, amen.

“A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse.” Those words were ascribed to King Richard III of England by William Shakespeare in his play named for that ill-fated king. Richard the III has the distinction of being England's last king to die on the battlefield. He was killed in the ‘War of the Roses’, the civil war that rocked England for decades in the 15th Century. The battle between two rival houses, claiming the throne. Richard the III of York was killed by Henry Tudor in 1485. Henry Tudor became Henry the VII. Well, you may have been hearing something about Richard the III recently if you've been looking at the news. They uncovered his body beneath a parking lot in Lister, England. They thought his burial place was close to there and they finally got permission and dug up the parking lot, and sure enough they found the bones of a man who appeared possibly to be Richard the III. In fact, one of the things that was known about him from history is he had a notoriously curved spine. He had a very bad case of scoliosis. The corpse they uncovered had a notoriously curved spine, and it had the blows on the skull and parts of the body that showed it had died a violent death, a horrible death in warfare. Richard was saying, “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse,” because he was unhorsed during the battle, and when you're down on the ground you're more vulnerable. He wanted to be back up on the horse where the kings and nobles normally were. He was struck down.

Well, DNA evidence, it's amazing what scientists can do, and though it's a little bit questionable exactly how accurate it is in all cases, a number of scientists tested the bones of Richard the III. They examined mitochondrial DNA. That's 530 years old, almost 530 years old, they examined mitochondrial DNA and confirmed that this corpse is the ancestor of a man that today claimed to be a descendant, a living descendant of Richard the III. His name is Michael Ibsen. It matched. Isn't that astounding? It's kind of a reverse paternity test. Normally you are trying to see who the father is and see if the child belongs to this father. This time they were trying to see if this father belonged to this child. But the analogy is that there are

objectively observable traits, genetic traits which can verify the relationship between an ancestor and a descendant. There are objective observable traits, genetic traits that can verify the connection between a father and a son, a father and a daughter, a father and his child. The passage before us is really a paternity dispute. The question that Jesus is posing to His hearers as these who have professed a kind of faith, the text says they are believing a sort of belief. Jesus is probing their hearts and helping them see their losses so that they might truly, more fully believe, and He's basically asking this question, a question about paternity: "Do you know who your father is?" That is the question Jesus addresses to the crowd of would-be disciples.

Now their claim, they have a twofold paternity claim. They claim that Abraham is their father, and they claim that God is their Father. It's interesting, the word *'father'* occurs nine times in seven verses from Verse 38-44. They claim that Abraham is their father, and Jesus even allows that they are physical descendants of Abraham. In Verse 37, He says: *I know that you are Abraham's descendants;... Offspring, seed. I know that you are Abraham's descendants;...* but His point is, "You may be physically connected to Abraham, but you are not his children," in the truest sense of the word. "Because if you were his children you would look like Him spiritually." If we were able to take out a spiritual DNA test, we could apply it, and basically that's what Jesus does. They make a twofold claim, they say, "We're Abraham's children," and then as Jesus continues to press them they say they're God's children. "Abraham is our father. God is our Father." What Jesus basically does in this passage is say, "If that is the claim that you're making, let me put up some observable, spiritual, genetic traits and let's see if there's a match." He gives us two important tests of our spiritual paternity.

Now if you are I profess to be Christians this morning, if we profess to be believers, we make precisely the same two claims as these Jews made in that 1st Century encounter with Jesus. If you claim to be a Christian, you claim to be, whether you know it or not, you claim to be a descendant of Abraham spiritually, which is what really mattered. That is what Jesus was talking about here. The physical didn't matter, it was spiritually, "Are you a child of Abraham? A child of the faith of Abraham?" I want to read you a couple of passages, Galatians 3:6-7. Paul writes in Galatians:

Galatians 3:6-7 ~ Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

In Romans 4 it says the same thing in Verse 16.

Romans 4:16 ~ For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

This is why Abraham is called a father of many nations, it's what he says in Verse 17.

Romans 4:17 ~ (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU")...

He is a father of every tribe and kindred who places faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Abraham, when God was speaking that blessing to him, "I'm going to make you a father of many nations," He was prophesying the fact that he was going to be the spiritual father of people from the farthest reaches of the globe, spiritually, everyone who places faith in Christ. So you proclaim you're a Christian, and I proclaim I'm a Christian, then we are saying that we're children of Abraham, but we also claim that we're children of God. Paul helps us here as well to be sure of this. To become a Christian is to become a child of God. We weren't the children of God, but now we are by faith. You see this also in Galatians and Romans. I should have told you to hold your place in Galatians 3, now Galatians 4, and we're going to go back to Romans as well. In Galatians 4:4, the apostle Paul shows us what Jesus has done for us in saving us.

Galatians 4:4-7 ~ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

That's the glory of what Jesus Christ has done for us. When you come to the Son, you become a son, an adopted child of the living God. Paul says much the same thing in Romans 8:15.

Romans 8:15 ~ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Abba is the transliteration of an Aramaic word which means 'Papa' or 'Daddy'. The idea is that when the Spirit of God causes you to be born again, He creates in you this sense that God is your Father because there is a spiritual, real connection. You are begotten of God, born again and so that there's a sense in which we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Romans 8:16-17 ~ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

So we make the same claim that the Jews make if we proclaim to be a Christian. We make the claim of being a son of Abraham, a daughter of Abraham, a son or daughter of God.

Now what does Jesus do to test this though? Back to our text, John 8. Essentially, it deals with both paternity questions. There are two questions and two criteria, one criterion each for the question. There is a question and a criterion by which you answer the question. The first question it, we're going to look at these two questions, "Are you truly a child of Abraham?" The second question is: "Are you truly a child of God?" Now that first question, we want to start there.

1) Are You Truly a Child of Abraham?

The criterion by which Jesus wants us to examine that, the objective observable way that you look at this He says, is in another question. This is the criterion by which you see if you're a child of Abraham. How do you respond to the Word of Christ? He says in Verse 37, He lays this out for us when He acknowledges their earthly descent, or their physical descent from Abraham. He says:

John 8:37 ~ I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

"You're Abraham's descendants, but you're not acting like Abraham at all because My Word has no place in you." The implication is the opposite was true of Abraham. "The Word, My Word had a place in Abraham, but it has no place in you." This thing is carried further when they say in Verse 39:

*John 8:39 ~ 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.*

Verse 40:

*John 8:40 ~ 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.*

Do you see? The issue is: How did Abraham respond to the truth? How are they responding to the truth? That’s the litmus test, that’s the criterion. ...***My word has no place in you.*** We mentioned this last time and I want to elaborate a little more on it, because we didn’t really consider Abraham like we need to today. We’ve said that this Word, ...***My Word has no place in you.*** Or the NIV says: ...***you make no room for My Word.*** ‘Make no room’, ‘has no place’ is a Greek verb which has the idea of yielding. It comes from a word which they think originated from an area, geographical area which was wide open space. It can sometimes refer to a wind that blew across from that wide open space, but over time, the etymology, the words develop, meaning changes over time, and by the time Jesus uses this word, the idea is not of a wind or of an open space, but the idea of making room, making an open space. Physically it pictures movement. Kind of like somebody comes in and you’ve got everybody sitting on the couch in the sitting room, and in a chair, and somebody comes in and there’s no place to sit down. Somebody gets up and scoots over. You make room. Sometimes the young guys, boys, especially pay attention to this, you should get up and sit on the floor. Let a lady, or even a little girl, sit down instead of you. That’s just extra.

We need to make room for the Word of God. The idea is that the Word of God, the Word of Christ, when He speaks, He doesn’t speak out here in the theoretical. This is true, every passage of Scripture is this way, it makes a claim on your life. He’s making a claim on your mind, on your heart, and on your life. So the question is: When the Word of Christ speaks, when God speaks through His holy Word, are you making room for it like Abraham did? And He contrasts Abraham with the people that He’s talking to. Let’s look at both of them for a moment. This idea of, “Are you truly a child of Abraham?” The criterion, “How do you respond the word of Christ?”

Look at Abraham’s responses. We read about them earlier in Hebrews 11. Just think about that for a moment. Abraham responded in faith, saving faith. What did that faith look like? God appeared to Abraham and in some way made clear that He

was speaking to him and He said, “Abram,” back when he was Abram only. By the way, Abram’s name means, the name Abram in his language, in Hebrew then came to mean this too, means ‘*exalted father*’, Abram. God comes to Abraham when he is 75 years old, his wife is 65. They have no children but he is named ‘*exalted father*’. So anyway, God comes to him and says, “Now Abram, I want you to leave your homeland and I’m going to make a covenant with you. I want you to go to the land, I’m going to give you a country. I’m going to give you a land and I’m not going to tell you where it is. You just get up and go.” “Where do I go? I can’t even begin to plug in any coordinates into my GPS. I don’t have a phone number.” “No, get up and go to the land that I will show you.” Now that required him to make some room for the Word of Christ. He could have started arguing. “Lord, You’re being unreasonable. At least give me some initials.” No, God didn’t give him that. He just said, “Go.” He got up and he packed up and he started going. That was the first step that Abram showed. He also tells him, “I’ll make you a great nation. You’re ‘*exalted father*’ but you’re a man who has not yet had children. Every time you have to meet somebody and they say, ‘What’s your name?’ You say ‘*exalted father*’.” “Well, how many children do you have?” “Zero.” “Hmm.” That’s pretty humorous. A lot of laughs at his expense.

He gets up and he goes. He’s going to have a land and he’s going to have children. He takes off and people say, “Where are you going?” “I’m going to the land that God is going to give me.” “Well, hey, where is that?” “I don’t know. He’s going to make me a great nation too.” “How many children do you have?” “Zero.” You see? He places his faith in the Word of Christ regardless of what appearances are. He’s not judging by human standards, he is submitting himself to the Word of God. If God has said it, that settles it. So that’s the first thing we saw.

Then he goes on into the land of Canaan and he’s there for ten years. He’s now 85 and the Lord appears to him. The Lord didn’t appear to him every day. We don’t have that many opportunities that Scripture shows us, how many times that Abraham had the Lord appear to him or speak to him. In fact, it looks like it was about ten years from the previous time before. Think about that. That’s a long time. God says to him, “Abram, I’m your very great reward.” Abram begins saying, “Hey, what about my children? I don’t have any descendants. Here my name is ‘*exalted father*’. You told me I’m going to be a great nation and the biological clocks are ticking, ticking, ticking for me and my wife. I’m 85, she’s 75.” I’m filling in a lot of what he didn’t say out loud according to the text, but he had to be thinking, “Lord, it’s time for us. I haven’t had a descendant yet. This guy, this cousin of mine, is going to be my heir, Eliezer of Damascus.” The Lord says to him, “Look up at the stars of the heavens. Can you count them? So shall your

descendants be.” The Bible says in Genesis 15:6, one of the most important verses in all of Holy Scripture, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. He was justified by faith alone. Faith in the promise and the work of God, nothing of himself. Looking at himself at 85, looking at his wife at 75, there’s no way. “I believe God.” That is the paradigm that will be the way that we’re saved, laid out there in the very book of beginnings, the Book of Genesis. Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And he believes, he makes room for the Word again. “Lord, I don’t know why You’re waiting, but You’ve spoken and so I submit.”

Then 14 more years pass by. There is a little hiccup there with Hagar and Sarah, where they get creative to try to help God along. Actually, Abram is happier at this point. He’s thinking, “Well, I’ve got the son now.” Ishmael is the son that God is going to bless, and the Lord comes to him at age 99 and says, “Abram, I’ve got news for you. I’m going to give you a son this time next year. Sarah is going to have a son.” And Abram, he can’t believe it. He laughs, “That’s impossible for Sarah to have a son. She is now 89 years old. I’m 99 and we’ve been married for a long, long, long time. Oh, that Ishmael may live before you.” He said, “I must have misunderstood you. Just bless Ishmael,” he says. God says, “No, from Sarah I will give you a son. In Isaac your descendants will be named.” Abram believes the Lord again. He’s now Abraham, He makes his name Abraham. Now he has his name, not *‘exalted father’*, but *‘father of a multitude’*.

I think that first few months after that were still kind of tough for him. “Hey, Abram, how are you doing?” “I’m sorry, my name has changed.” Isn’t that awkward already? I mean to change your name. I had a friend in high school who his whole life was named Alan, and his senior year in high school he decided to go by Paul. I remember it was just natural to say, “Hey, Alan...” “Paul.” “Alan.” “Paul.” Anyway, it was annoying. It was hard work though to change your name, and to have to remind people. So when people said, “Abram...” “I’m sorry, my name is Abraham. I’m the father of a multitude.” “This Abram has lost his mind. He’s only got one child and that’s by the slave woman.” “No, God is going to give me another child by Sarah.” He believes the Lord, and at 100 years old, he receives the promise, His son Isaac is born. Sarah names him *‘laughter’* for God has made her laugh in her old age. The Lord tells him shortly after that, “You’ve got to let Ishmael go. Ishmael and Hagar need to leave.” Remember, Ishmael was taunting Isaac. There was spiritual warfare going on where Satan was working through Ishmael in his jealousy to try to harm the child of promise. God says, “Yes, let him go. Send him away.”

So he sends him away. He believes the Lord again. He didn't want to do that. The first time his wife made a suggestion, in Genesis 16, he followed her lead. That was to take Hagar in, and that was where he shouldn't have listened to his wife, but this time his wife makes a suggestion and he doesn't want to follow her lead, but he prays and God says, "Listen to what she says. She's right." So he does that.

Then the Lord has given him now this child. He sent Hagar away and Ishmael away, and now in Chapter 22, we don't know exactly how old Isaac is. He's probably 8, 9, or 10 years old. Maybe he's 11 or 12. He's certainly a young child, a young boy, and God says, "Go offer him as a sacrifice to Me." I mean, can you imagine that? Put yourself in his place for just a moment. I remember reading that chapter some years back when I was preaching through Genesis, and studying through it, and reading it, and there's a cadence about Genesis 22 that it seems in the mind of God, there was a dual desire. One was to really get Abraham's heart at such a level that He makes it excruciatingly painful. There's a bigger picture going on, too, which is to show the glory of what God's going to do. But remember what He says is, "Abraham, take your son..." This is the cadence I'm talking about. "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac."

Now, why didn't He just say, "Take Isaac." He said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love." Do you see that? Isn't that amazing? And He does that again and again through the chapter. "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and offer him to Me as a sacrifice." It's completely contradicting everything that God has told him. "Through Isaac, your descendents will be named."

"Isaac's going to be the one who's going to carry on the line, not Ishmael, and You're telling me to kill him." It says he got up the next morning early and set off in the direction God told him to go. He didn't argue with God. He didn't delay it a couple of days, "Maybe I should make sure I heard correctly." He got up and he went straight in the direction God told him to go. How hard that was for him to do? He takes him all the way. He leaves the servants behind because they might try to interfere. "They don't know what God's told me to do." He leaves them behind. He takes Isaac on ahead. Isaac's carrying the wood. He makes Isaac carry the wood for the fire, because they've got to carry the wood. Abraham's got the knife. He looks up at his dad and he says, "Dad, I have the wood. You've got the knife, but where is the offering? Where is the sacrifice?"

Can you imagine the heartbreak in Abraham's soul as he has to hear that question from his son, knowing that his son is the sacrifice? But he says, "The Lord will provide." He has eyes of faith because he's followed God. He didn't argue with

God. He followed Him. He submitted, and the Lord keeps enlarging his faith as he keeps trusting. It's like he keeps stepping in obedience. God says, "Take one step forward," he takes it, and in fact, if you think about it, the Christian life is really like this. I heard someone use this metaphor. Everything in our life if you think about it really, all we can see is what's happening right now, and so imagine you're walking down a path and there's this big curtain where every time you take a step, this curtain moves forward one step. What do you see? You see one more step. You have no idea what's on the other side of that second step. You might think you know where you're going, but we really don't, do we?

So what is faith? It's to keep trusting God when all He shows you is one step. That's what Abraham did, and he does it, and he tells Isaac, "The Lord's going to provide." He gets him up there. He ties Isaac to the altar. Somehow God has given Isaac grace. He doesn't know what's going on, but he's not resisting his father. He raises his hand above Isaac ready to bring down the blow upon his own son, and the Lord says, "Abraham, Abraham, stop. For now I know that you will not withhold from Me your son, your only son, whom you love. Don't harm the boy. And because of this, you're going to inherit the promises."

Now, he told him that in Genesis 12, but what happens is true faith keeps growing. True faith continues to submit. Christ speaks more words to you and you continue to submit, and not always perfectly. Abraham's a pretty impressive example, though he has his hiccups, too, when you look closely at all those chapters. But true faith essentially will yield, will make room, for the Word of Christ. It trusts. It doesn't insist on understanding everything. It doesn't insist that God's Word fits my spiritual palate, because God doesn't really care whether you or I like what He says. Why would He? We are conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, we live in a world which is filled with all kinds of lies, we've been cultivated in that kind of wrong thinking, and we think we should then stand up and decide what ought to be true and what ought not to be true? Of course not. The Lord, He will reveal Himself as He chooses.

One aspect of saving faith is it responds to the Word of Christ by making place for it, yielding. It doesn't mean that you don't wrestle, but that ultimately there's a yielding. It doesn't mean that you don't wander. We talked about this a few weeks ago. We're all like sheep. We forget. Sometimes we want to run away when the Savior speaks and we find ourselves wandering, but the mark of a true believer is he comes back at some point. The Lord disciplines those whom He loves. He'll come after you, won't He? Aren't you glad He comes after you? How good He is.

Now, in contrast, think about that portrait. He's basically saying, "You're not doing the deeds of Abraham. Those are the deeds of Abraham." He says, "You're not doing the deeds of Abraham," and it's evident in the text they're not doing the deeds of Abraham. Now, look with me. In just these verses from 31 to 41, you have Jesus three times having extended teaching segments or statements. He's saying some things. He's giving His Word, and watch their responses. How do you respond to the Word of Christ? Do you make room for it? In Verses 31 and 32, He says:

John 8:31-32 ~ ...“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

He's right there saying, "Not everybody's truly My disciple, and the ones who continue in My Word are truly My disciples, and you'll become free if you stay in My Word." What do they do? Do they make room for the Word of Christ? No, they argue immediately:

John 8:33 ~ They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?”

They're saying, "Who are You to tell us that we need to be made free?" Do you see that attitude? And look at verses 34 to 38. He says:

John 8:34-38 ~ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.”

He says, "I'm looking into your heart and I see you want to kill Me because you are doing the deeds of your father." Rather than saying, "What do You mean, Lord? What do You mean we're doing the deeds of our father? Help us understand," they say defiantly, "Abraham is our father." See, the Good Shepherd is probing their hearts. "You've got a problem in your heart. Let Me open up your heart to Me and fix it," and they say, "No, back off. Abraham is our father." So He then says:

John 8:39 ~ ...“If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 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. 41 You are doing the deeds of your father.”

He takes a second time back at it. “You’re doing the deeds of your father.” He wants to tell them that their spiritual problem is a lot bigger than they realized. What do they do?

John 8:41 ~ They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”

Their response is to argue, and to argue, and to argue. That is a mark of false faith, unbelief. How do you respond to the Word of Christ? Do you argue? Is that your first response, your initial response?

Now, it’s a mixed bag. We still have a sin nature, so there are times where we find ourselves arguing, but what’s the inner, ultimate disposition of your heart? Are you willing to make room for the Word of God? Now, this shows up in different ways. It shows up even theologically. There are a lot of theological issues that are complex that we have to study and grow in our understanding of, and we’re supposed to be Bereans, that is, we’re supposed to make sure. You don’t just believe what someone says because they say it. In Acts 17:11, remember the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians. Why? Because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what the apostle Paul was saying was true. That’s pretty profound. That means that they didn’t take it just based on the fact that he was an apostle. They wanted to see if what the apostles said matched up to the Scriptures. That’s a very important test. Always test the teaching. Hold to that which is good.

Yet at the same time, the question is when the Word is clearly seen and clearly explained, are you willing to submit to it? And you may have to wrestle with it for awhile, but do you find yourself submitting to it, or do you say things – I’ve had friends say to me or people and acquaintances say to me at times, “If God is like that, I want no part of Him. I cannot serve a God like that.” This usually comes up like in issues of election. It really makes me troubled for someone, and I try to say, “Hey, I understand that this is troubling and difficult.” I felt the same way when I first looked at these things. *Lord, it doesn’t seem fair to me. I don’t understand.* But the question is ultimately if God says it and you’re clear that He says it, would you submit to it? I’m not saying that you agreed that He’s saying it. You may think

He's not, but I'm more concerned about your soul, that if you could find out what He says, would you submit to it? It may take you years.

In fact, many brothers never come around to that. There are people like Wesley and Whitfield who disagreed on that issue all the way to the grave, and then when they got to heaven, Whitfield straightened Wesley out. But seriously, the issue really isn't that. We're all going to be wrong on theological issues. We're all going to have things where we're going to realize we were so wrong, and isn't it funny how just today you look at what you believed ten years ago? "Man, I didn't know that. What was I thinking?" But the question is: What is the disposition of the heart? Is there a humble, teachable spirit? And not just on theological issues, but practical issues. I mean, are we willing to yield to the Word of God over our experience? "I've had this experience. I feel like God has said this to me, but the Bible says something different."

The counseling seminar this week had an excellent talk on knowing the will of God. It's just such an important area where there's so much confusion in the evangelical church, and a lot happens where someone says, "God told me," and then whatever they put behind it, you're supposed to accept uncritically. Well, I don't think that's Biblical. What do you mean God told you? "God told me to buy this car." Really? The guy used an illustration. He says what if one of you came up to me tonight and said, "God told me that He wants us to go out for a nice dinner. We're going to go to this restaurant, and we're going to have the whole thing. We're going to have a big dinner – lobster tails, a steak, and a nice dessert, and God told me to leave the restaurant without paying, because this restaurant is owned by wicked people and they're just going to use the money for evil. God told me that." And the guy said, "If you told me that, I would say right now that God did not tell you that." "Well, I had an experience. I felt it. I feel at peace about this."

It doesn't matter if you feel at peace about it. The Word of God says real clearly, "Thou shalt not steal," so the Lord did not tell you to steal. You see, the Word of God has to be over our experience. *I feel like I should do this. I feel like I should leave my wife and marry this other woman. I feel like I should leave my husband and marry this other man. I feel like I'd be happy then.* It doesn't matter what you feel. It matters what God says. The true believer can backslide even to leaving a spouse and remarrying. It happens, but the true believer will repent at some point. The true believer will repent and say, "I was an animal in my thinking. I was like a brainless fool. I dishonored Christ. Oh, that I could go back and fix it."

So what is our attitude toward the Word of God? Do we live by our experience or do we submit to the Word of God? That's the first test. Are you truly a child of Abraham?

2) Are You Truly a Child of God?

That's the second question. Are you truly a child of God? They say in Verse 41:

John 8:41 ~ ...“We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”

And Jesus then puts up a second paternity test. Verse 42:

John 8:42 ~ Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me,...

The criterion really for this is if you're a child of God, how do you respond not to the Word of Christ explicitly, but the Person of Christ? How do you respond to the Person of Christ? Now, these are very closely related, and in fact, you can't really separate them. It's like two sides of a coin. How do you respond to the Person of Christ and the Word of Christ? They go together, and I think that's why the Lord has this laid out this way. But what He says is:

John 8:42 ~ “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God,...

The idea is, “If you loved God, if you were His child, you would love Me, because I have come from Him. I'm His Son. In fact, if you've seen Me, you've seen Him. You say you love Him and you hate Me? How can that be? You say you know Him, you're born of Him, and you hate Me? That can't make sense.” And He points out in the passage that they do hate Him. He says twice in this passage they're seeking to kill Him.

John 8:37 ~ ...you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

John 8:40 ~ But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth,...

In fact, in Verse 59, the last verse of the chapter, they pick up stones to kill Him, but Jesus eludes their grasp. *You cannot love God and hate the One who proceeds forth from God.* So how do you feel about Jesus Christ?

Now, this is important because one of the things I think that happens is we can have a theoretical opinion of Jesus. In theory we like Him, we love Him, but in practice, we don't. That's what they had. They had a theoretical love of the Messiah. They wanted the Messiah to come, but when the Messiah came, they rejected Him because they didn't like the Messiah that He was. They didn't like how He came, and this really gets to the fact that when Jesus comes, how do you respond to the Person of Christ? We might also say: How do you respond to the presence of Christ? I think that's a helpful image, because His presence is when He comes into your space personally, and when Jesus comes, this is a characteristic that is always true of Jesus, it's pictured in that story, an interesting picture in Joshua 5.

Do you remember when Joshua is nervous about the conquest? They're going to try to attack Jericho. He's off by himself probably praying about this attack on this great walled city, and it says a man comes to him, and Joshua, seeing him, is alarmed. Obviously the appearance of this one that comes is somewhat alarming. He senses the greatness of this person, and he says, "Are you for us or are you for the enemy? Are you with us or are you with them?" and I think it's the pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, but the angel of the Lord says, "Neither, but I have come as Captain of the armies of host." Joshua wanted him to take sides. "Are you with us or are you with them?" Jesus doesn't take sides. He takes charge.

"It's not about whether I'm with you. I don't come and join your side. You submit to Me." Whenever Jesus Christ comes into your life, that's how He comes, and if you will not receive Him that way, you will not receive Him, because He doesn't come to play second fiddle to anyone. He comes to take charge. So that's what we see consistently in the teaching and preaching ministry of Jesus. He's always calling for an all-out commitment. He doesn't come and say, "Add Me to your life." You keep going the direction you're going, and He says, "You stop going in the direction you're going, and follow Me." It's interesting, too, that the Lord does this in such a way that He humbles us, and the way that Christ makes Himself known, if you step back from it and look at the panorama of history, it's really quite marvelous that God, when He wants to speak and save, He chooses to send one of us. God the Son becomes true Man.

Now, I say that because I think in some ways if you were just trying to be... It wouldn't have worked because like I said, we think wrong. We don't know what we're talking about, but in my limited mind, I think it would have been more impressive if God had just appeared in some kind of giant, visible thing, and said, "I'm God. Obey Me," and He spun the moon around on His finger. It would have terrified everybody, but He wouldn't have got what He intended, because the hearts of men were too messed up for that. They might have outwardly submitted while inwardly hating Him. But what God did is He came and He spoke through human mouth. In fact, that's exactly what Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is talking about. Moses at the end of his ministry tells the Jews, "From then on, you're going to know when God speaks to you. After you've heard me, you've had me as a great prophet, now I'm about to die, and this is how you're going to recognize God's voice."

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 ~ "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen,..."

The Hebrew says: "***From among your own brothers,...***" and every prophet was from among their own brothers. Ultimately that's talking about Jesus. Where are you going to hear God's voice? Ultimately it's going to be from one of your own kind. One of your own brothers is going to come. Now, isn't that interesting? Glory in such a humble package. Here He comes on the scene and He's not that impressive looking a guy, according to Isaiah. He has no stately form or majesty that we should be drawn to Him. He's a Jew from Galilee, not even from a good part of the country. He's the most unlikely, and yet He comes and in Him dwells the fullness of deity in bodily form. Why is that? Because God knows that our biggest problem is pride. We need to humble ourselves before His face. This is the way the Lord works.

In fact, there's a great quote where John Calvin talks about how the Lord does this. He continues to use this means of speaking through people, and that's what I want to get at. Basically I'm saying that the presence of Christ comes so often – in our lives it's always accompanying the Word of Christ. The presence comes with His Word, but the way He chooses to bring it to you most profoundly is through other people. He brings somebody else weak like you, and He puts His words in their mouth, and when they speak, He's speaking to you. That's exactly what Matthew 18:15-20 is talking about when it says in Verse 20:

Matthew 18:20 ~ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

That's so often used as like a slogan for prayer meetings. *We've got a low turnout tonight, but where two or three are gathered, there I am in your midst, so we can pray.* Right? That's not the context, though. I mean, that was certainly implied, but it's not the context. The context is when two or three people go after a sinning, erring brother, and they say, "You're in sin. You are in sin in this area, and you need to repent," where two or three are gathered, there am I in their midst. Jesus says, "When they say that, I'm saying that. I'm shepherding My sheep." So the question is why is it that way? It's because He wants to humble us. Calvin writes this about the preaching and teaching of the Word. Why is it that we gather like this and we sit and listen to a man speak the Word of God? Why is it that God has done that? Listen to what he says:

Again, this is the best and most useful exercise in humility, when He accustoms us to obey His Word, even though it be preached through men like us and sometimes even by those of lower worth than we. If He spoke from heaven, it would not be surprising if His sacred oracles were to be reverently received without delay by the ears and minds of all. For who would not dread the presence of His power? Who would not be stricken down at the sight of such great majesty? Who would not be confounded at such boundless splendor? But when a puny man risen from the dust speaks in God's Name, at this point we best truly evidence our piety and reverence toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward His minister, although he excels us in no way.

Isn't that amazing? That's the wisdom of God, and it's not just the preaching of the Word, but it's when we minister the Word one-on-one. When a puny man risen from the dust speaks God's Word to you, and he speaks it truly, you may not like it. Let me say this really quickly. It's much easier to admit that you're a sinner in generalities. Isn't that true? "Man, I'm such a terrible sinner. I'm the worst of sinners, but when you come and you point your finger, and you say, 'What about that issue right there, how you handled that situation?' then I'm defensive." It's much harder to deal with the particulars, isn't it? It's because with the particular sin it's like it's an intravenous wound and it goes right to the heart. You can say generalities like, "I'm a sinner," and it's like a shield around you, but to show the reality of how you obey Christ, when He sends someone to you and says, "This is the problem. This is the concern I have," how do you respond to that? How do I respond to that? That's the issue. There's a disposition to say, "Lord, I believe that You are my Shepherd and You're shepherding me, so help me to understand. Help me to test what's said and to hold to that which is good, to love the person, not to hate them..."

I was thinking about the fact, and I mentioned this last time, that sometimes we get overcome by the fact that somebody's attitude's not right when they come, or: *Why would this person be the one that's supposed to correct me? You shouldn't be talking to me about this. This should be coming from somebody else. I could take this if it was from one of the Elders, but not from you.*

What that's like doing is like looking at the staff. Here's a sheep. He's wandering away. The Good Shepherd walks over and He hits the sheep with the staff, and the sheep looks at the staff and says, "What is that gnarly stick doing hitting me? Look at that twisted stick. I'm not going to listen to that." When somebody comes with Christ's Name there in his hand, they may be gnarly. They may be messed up. They may have overdone it a little bit, but Jesus is working through even all of that. They may be sinning at the time, and they need to be corrected. After you humble yourself under them, you might have to say, "Hey, I really feel like the way you came could have been better," but if you're looking at Christ, you will humble yourself under that. That's what we must do. We must be people who are ready to receive the Word of Christ, to humble ourselves before it, and to be ready to receive the presence of Christ. When He comes and He says, "I'm here to take charge in this area of your life," what do we do? It makes all the difference.

Let's pray together...

Father, we thank You that You are the Living God, and that You are a God who is concerned about everything in our lives. You want every part of us to be surrendered to You. You want every area of our life to honor You, and we're so grateful that You not only have that glorious vision for us, but You also understand our weakness. You know our frame. You're mindful that we're dust, and so You have compassion on us. We come rejoicing that You not only have that as a Fatherly compassion, but Jesus Christ is our High Priest. The Shepherd knows what it's like to live as a sheep. He understands. Father, we pray that You would open the eyes of all of our hearts to see the glory of so wondrous a Savior, One who would die for us in our place, bearing our sins, that He might bring us back to God. If He loved us like that, we can trust Him. We can humble ourselves under His Word and under His Lordship. Father, be with all of us this morning. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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