

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Jesus is giving additional, deeper insights into His nature and role both in the universe and in us as individuals. He is Truth for eternity and for us now in our daily lives. Jesus states, *you are truly my disciples when you not only believe, but also trust and obey my teachings. Then you will know the true truth and the truth will set you free.* The religious leaders protested; they rebutted in their cynicism saying, *we are descendants of Abraham. We do not need you; we are not slaves to anyone or anything, therefore you can't set us free. So, what do you mean?* Jesus replied; *you are slaves to sin—everyone is; you are not members of God's family just as a slave is not a son to the family to whom he belongs. Yet the Son will set you, the slave, free and you can be a part of God's family forever. Then, you will indeed be free from sin. Even though you are descendents of Abraham, you still have sin, so why are you trying to kill me? You will not allow my message to go into your hearts. I follow My Father, God, and you follow your father, sin. If you really were children of Abraham and if he were really your father, you would recognize me and not be slaves to sin. You at least would follow His good examples. Why do you not understand? You act like children of the devil, not children of Abraham or of God! There is no goodness or truth in the devil—just as you display. You who are of sin accuse me of sin? I have no sin, yet you do! If God were your father, you would listen; since you do not, you prove yourselves to be slaves to sin and children of the devil.*

Contexts and Background:

This passage continues Jesus' discourse during the Feast of Tabernacles. Here, we have a continuing "tit for tat" dialogue and sarcasm on who is being true, truthful, and pious—the Pharisees demonstrating they are not, and Jesus showing He is Truth. Jesus is both challenging the prim and proper hypocrites, the "pious fraud" religious environment and giving comfort to His listeners. This passage would have been of a great comfort to John's readers too, because his people were starting to face major opposition from their Jewish relatives and leaders, the foremost opposition coming from the Romans. Both were seeking to kill these early Christians just as the establishment was seeking to kill our Lord.

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Believed.* Meaning to make a profession of faith. The subject here is salvation, meaning to learn and pay attention and absorb what is being said. Belief leads to trust that leads to commitment that leads to obedience, but belief alone leads nowhere but to a holding pattern.
- *Disciples.* A committed and pledged follower who makes a profession of faith and then goes beyond his/her initial belief to practicing their faith by following Christ.
- *You will know the truth.* Meaning that when we commit to and follow through with Jesus' teaching, we hold to His truth, because He is the truth (John 14:6-10; 18:37).
- *Truth.* This is what is called "true-Truth." It is God's Truth, not philosophical truth; God's truth is fact, not some idea manipulated by faulty reason, relativistic ideas, or personal or political agendas. For the Greeks, this meant the absence of confusion and the embodiment of "real reality" that is not bound to or by any human reason, philosophy, or that which can't be misrepresented or corrupted. For the Jews, this meant being true to one's character, integrity, lineage, and being faithful. Jesus embodied both. Here, this is real and effectual knowledge of whom, why, and what information there is concerning Jesus Christ. The Pharisees saw truth in their traditions, but Jesus combated their notions (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:1-8; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18).
- *Set you free.* A term that could also be applied to setting a slave free, and how wondrous it would be for them. Following truth will set you free from the ternary of bad thinking that leads to sin that leads to a bad or nonexistent relationship with God.
- *Abraham's descendants.* Abraham is the main Jewish Patriarch regarded as the founder of Judaism. Jesus pointed out that not all of the Jews were God's people. The Jews believed they were

guaranteed salvation (as long as they were not wicked) just for being born a Jew, but this is not in the Bible; rather, the contrary is found there (Num. 14:22-23; Deut. 1:34-35; Psalm 78:21-22; 95:8-11; 106:26-27)!

- *Never been slaves.* This is not a people who did not know their history; they did! It was their claim that even though the Romans were in power, they were not slaves because God was their true King.
- *Slaves.* A person who is owned and/or held in bondage for a payment or as a captive servant. This also means being held captive as a people like what the Romans were doing then, and the Assyrians and Babylonians and Egyptians did prior to that. Jesus was not saying they were slaves literally, the lowest class of people and an extreme insult, but that they were captive to false thinking and wayward traditions to the point that they could not see real Truth. They could not understand because their pride was in the way and they rationalized their thinking as truth when it was not.
- *Slave to sin.* Without a commitment to the Truth of our Lord, we will stay in sin and dysfunction. These religious leaders thought that their tie to Abraham was enough; Jesus stated that this tie was not enough, that the tie they claimed did not even exist. This is also a reference to the slavery in Egypt and later relentless conquest by the various invaders and then the Romans. The Pharisees were resting on another person's faith—Abraham's—and not developing their own.
- *Son sets you free.* Referring to the redemption we receive from Jesus that frees us, not from political or social bondage, but spiritual freedom that affects all of life and thinking. Just as the head of a home can set a slave free, so Christ can set us free from our bondage of sin, false ideas, bad thinking, bad choices, past hurts, or anything that has imprisoned us. Jews believed they needed to be free of sin—the Greeks from false ideas, but each led to the other and Christ can set us free from both (Isa. 56:5; Ezek. 46:16-17; John 2:16).
- *Kill me.* This was a challenge to the Pharisees as Jesus uncovered their deception and treachery. This is also a statement of encouragement for those in persecution. We have a God who has been there and is still here with us. Jesus faced what we have and will face in our lives and He can get us through (Ex. 4:31; 5:21; John 7:1-24; 8: 59).
- *Father's presence.* The common address Jesus gives to God the Father; this, in practice, is our reception of God's message that the religious leaders refused (John 1:14; 3:16; 20:17).
- *Your father.* Father means ancestor and they are the descendents. Also, in context, the prime influencer and model for their religious piety and who they imitated. Yet, they were not truly imitating his character or faith. This is a contrast to God's Holiness and true Truth versus their feeble and wayward ways (Gen. 18; Ex. 4:22).
- *Abraham is our father/children of Abraham.* A saying they had to claim they were "children of God," even that Israel itself was an adopted people. This could also be a retort to Jesus that He is the one who is illegitimate, as there was a rumor then that He was the child of Mary by rape of a Roman soldier, making them social pariahs. This, of course, was not true (Ex. 4:22-23; 40: 34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-11).
- *Illegitimate children.* This is also sarcasm, an extreme insult and retort from Jesus. This means they were outside of God, His plan and provision, and their mothers were guilty of adultery. Being a child of God involves practicing "sonship," trusting in and obeying our Lord, and following His direction; faith is defined by obedience, not biology or ethnicity (Ezek. 18).
- *Love me.* To love Jesus is to love God. We are given a choice either to live for Him or to remain in sin and darkness. The Pharisees chose darkness when, of all people, they knew better.
- *Unable to hear.* Clinging to sin and one's own determination to seek evil or to skip goodness to live in darkness. They, like all people who are sinners, were so converted and convinced of their own presumptions that they did not really hear. The meaning here is that we need a supernatural act to break our will and propensity of sin and that is what Christ does in the sending of the Holy Spirit.

- *Devil.* This is the Greek name for Satan meaning to accuse and slander, the opposite of Truth. This term means “adversary;” he is the chief adversary both to God and to humans. He is an angel who was kicked out of heaven because of his insurrection against God’s authority. He wants to destroy you. *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* The good news is that he has been already defeated in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 14:12-14; Matt. 13:39; Eph. 6:11; Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 12:10).
- *Your father’s desire.* Jesus is basically telling them they are the spiritual children of the devil even though their bloodlines are from Abraham because they are following the character and theme of the devil and not God or His real representatives like Abraham. Just as the devil accuses and slanders, so do you!
- *Murderer.* The opposite of “to give life,” this is a name and title of Satan meaning he is the destroyer and devourer. He is intent upon the callous and calculated destruction of God’s children (I Pet. 5:8; John 8:44; Rev. 9:11).
- *No truth.* This is also a description of Satan meaning he is the father, inspirer, and creator of lies. His goal is to steal God’s glory and plan through God’s people, and to stimulate us to lie (Acts 5:3)!
- *Native language.* A saying about preconceptions, meaning *you are so entrenched in falsehoods you are trying to convince me or yourself and/or you do not know what you are saying, because you did not think this through.*
- *Father of lies* - The opposite of truth. This is a name and title of Satan meaning his opposition to God and includes a vast host of fallen angels and his counterfeit proposals, which do not derive their source from the Lord. It describes Satan as the source (father) of all that is untrue (lies), thus the religious leaders were also lying (1 John 3:8).
- *Do not believe.* They tried with all their might to find fault with Jesus but could not, so they just got angrier and sought to kill Him. Sin penalizes and paralyzes one’s ability to think and make good choices or to know God (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26).
- *Guilty.* Jesus is saying they are guilty of what they accuse Him of. This is what the Reformers called “Total Depravity.” The gravity and impact of sin is heinous and destructive; it deprives us of real good and fullness, it destroys relationships, and it keeps us away from God. As fallen people, we are in a predicament that can’t be solved by any human endeavor; we can’t know God or be free no matter how good we try to be. The good news is Jesus does indeed set us free (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:23; 6:23)
- *Belongs to God.* To hear God and trust Him as evidence that He is working in you.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Are you inventing or following Jesus? What these so called religious leaders were doing was inventing their own “god,” hiding behind their rules and regulations, and forcing others to conform, causing them a loss of perspective of God and life. This hid their own lack of righteousness by a pretend righteousness, missing the point of God’s law and promise of salvation that was standing in their midst. We do this today too. Many Christians focus on making God into their own image—inventing their own user-friendly Jesus. Thus, the Gospel is reduced and diluted into a mere personal narrative that had no real depth or impact back to God or self, let alone an impact to others around us.

We become so consumed and concerned with our own personal narrative, our preconceptions, and preoccupations of our religious life and views that we do not even see the One we are to know and follow; we only see our ideas of Him. These are ideas that are distilled from our musings and pride and not from the percepts of Scripture. A mere personal narrative of Christianity does not mean it is not personal, because it is, but so much more communal and connective. The problem is we can reduce it to just being personal so there is no touch back to God or to others, there is no discipleship growth, no maturity, and no effectual impact, just the smug self satisfaction of what we want, think, and feel. Meanwhile, the reality of Christ is missed just as these Pharisees missed it. It becomes all about the way

"I" see it, not what it really is supposed to be. Do not allow your Christianity to be dim or held in the darkness of the despair of bad thinking or laziness, or be too busy to learn and grow or turned under to the hindrance of pride. Allow the light of His Word to shine through so that your personal Christianity is impacted and communal and set ablaze to be a growing impact that pleases Him!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. When did you first make a profession of faith or give a testimony? How did it go? What does it mean to you now?
2. Have you ever rested on another person's faith, like a parent or pastor, and not develop your own? What did it take to make your faith yours? If this has not happened yet, what can you do?
3. How does it make you feel and strengthen your faith that God is reliable and truthful? What about that your human wisdom is weak on its best day and feeble on its own?
4. How would you explain to someone that Jesus is the only key for a right relationship with God?
5. What would Jesus say today to challenge our pious fraud religious environment as well as giving comfort to His people now?
6. Why would someone be turned off to something as great as eternal life or to have meaning, purpose, and contentment? How have you fed on our Lord? How do you need to?
7. How does it encourage you that we have a God who has been there and is still here with us?
8. What is cluttering up your temple? What call or dreams did the Lord give you that you have not followed through with yet?
9. Are you inventing Jesus or discovering His precepts? Is the life of Christ making applications in your life?
10. What do you need to do to make more applications of Jesus to shine in your life?
11. Jesus can set you free from your bondage of sin, false ideas, bad thinking, bad choices, past hurts, or anything that has imprisoned you. From what do you need to be set free? What will you do now?
12. What does it mean to you to be a committed follower? How do you go from one who makes a profession of faith to one who goes beyond belief into practice of the faith in following Christ? How will you become committed?