

<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

### **Like Father, Like Son**

Aside from the funny looks, children tend to be a lot like their parents. They inherit many of the same characteristics and mannerisms of their fathers. Sadly, not all of them are good. That’s why it’s said, “Like Father, Like Son.” That phrase is often said with a judgmental tone condemning a child, “You’re just like your father.” It’s a phrase that’s been around for generations along with many others such as, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” The truth is we tend to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us and sometimes it’s for the worse.

Since the very beginning of John’s Gospel Jesus has discussed his family and now upon arrival at chapter 8 we find a Jerry Springer moment with the Jews as they argue back and forth about, “Who’s the Father?” They claim, “Abraham is our Father” but Jesus points out, “That doesn’t mean you are legitimate children.” Then when Jesus states, “God is his Father” the Jews pick up stones to kill Jesus. They didn’t like what Jesus had to say about their father or his.

Sometimes we don’t either. Sometimes people blame anything but themselves for the problems in life. We’ll blame others, our parents, and even entire generations rather than accept the truth that this mess is our own. We’ll do anything to avoid the truth. Change last name, move cross country – like father, like son, like mother, like daughter. Like it or not the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

Although this phrase is almost never used with as positive statement Jesus changes that. He changes our status as children of God and points out even if our parents or fathers were failures – you have another father.

Jesus openly spoke of his Father and his Father's will. In John 3:16 we heard, *"God so loved the world that he sent his son to save."* His father's will is that *everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.* It's easy to understand who Jesus is and why he has come. He has come for his Father's will, to seek and to save the lost. And that is what he is doing at the beginning of chapter 8. A woman caught in adultery is brought before Jesus and he forgives her, challenging those around him, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." The Jews begin to hassle Jesus.

Jesus calls them slaves. They respond we are children of Abraham and boasted that they have never been slaves of anyone. Jesus responds, "You're illegitimate like Ishmael." They respond, "We aren't illegitimate!" Jesus says, "Your father is the devil." They respond, "You're a Samaritan and possessed by a demon." After a claim to be greater than their father, a claim to be God – they try to kill him. Why?

Just like their father. They were so enslaved to their self-proclaimed truth that they couldn't handle the truth. It's true Abraham was their father. It's partially true that they had never been slaves, if we forget the 400 years in Egypt, the 70 years in Babylon, and even now they are under Roman occupation – they have slaves physically but not spiritually. They had never been in bondage to any other idol. They have always had the one true God. They were sons of the promise but they also thought that the basis for their salvation is biological and based on "Who's the Father?" Natural descent is no guarantee for a spiritual descent.

Abraham had many sons. When Sarah was barren she told him to sleep with Hagar her maidservant, her slave. When she had a child, Ishmael mocked Isaac the son of the promise and was sent away. *A slave has no permanent place in the household. The son remains forever.* They were slaves to sin but instead of responding in anguish they respond in anger and denial, and even tried to carry out their Father's work – the devil. Like father, like son.

But going around telling people that they are children of the devil, and illegitimate children of Abraham rarely works at evangelism events. Even those who believe in Jesus don't want to hear of our sin and need for Jesus. We don't always want to hear the truth about our parents, our heritage, our family, or our father which is why we often blame others for our problems. People will do anything to avoid the truth even convince ourselves that we aren't that bad. We may hide our sin, deny it, or even point to our godly heritage as the basis for being accepted by God.

The truth. *All of us are born into this world with a deep need for baptism. From our parents we inherit a sinful nature; we are without true fear of God and true faith in God and are condemned to eternal death. (CW page 15).* There is no spiritual Switzerland. There is no neutral position. We are all born into the family at odds with God who rescues us and bring us into his family. Like father, like son.

Our position as Sons in God's family is not based on birth. And yet like the Jews we could easily boast of the religious freedom we have as "Children of the Reformation. We are Luther's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone." But that's not entirely true, nor does it fall within Jesus' teaching. If we keep doing sin, we become slaves to sin, unfaithful disciples, denying the truth, living in unrepentance makes one a slave to sin and disciple of the devil. That person has not permanent place.

A slave has no permanent place in the family. He can be sold at any moment. He can even be put to death in some circumstances. His position or status in the family is surely temporary. A slave is not "free", so how can a slave possibly set anyone else "free"? In the same way anyone who sins is not free. They are slaves of sin.

Unless the son sets you free...

That's exactly what Jesus was holding out to these Jews. But the Jews didn't want that. They thought, "We have a covenant (we have not kept) with God. We're religious. We're fine; thank you." In spite of this Jesus pleads with these people. He doesn't bring opinions but he brings a message from God who is everything like his father. That's because Jesus is God who came to seek, save, and serve.

God's Son stands in a very different position. His status is permanent. He can exercise the authority and enjoy the privileges of his father. A son can "free" a slave. Jesus goes back to the first thought of those set free by the truth. They are adopted as sons and made part of God's family. This cannot be done by our own power, strength, or birth – but only by the Son – who came to set us free.

At the beginning of chapter 8, the Jews are about to stone a woman caught in adultery but by the end of the chapter they want to stone the Son of God. The cross isn't far off and there we will see the Son take on the form of a servant and slave away his life for the slaves, who have not right, no permanent place in his kingdom. Jesus was put to death for our sins and he is just like his father. Like

Father, Like Son. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus came to show us the Father. All we need to do is look to Jesus. Then we will know the Father.

The father sent the son he loved to step in the shoes of slaves and there he suffered and died for us so we could be set free. But the son didn't just die. He came back. In few weeks Christ the King Sunday we will see him seated on his throne, ruling the world for the good of his church, his family.

You've been set free. You are no longer slaves to sin. *"You are truly Jesus' disciples, and you know the truth, and the truth has set you free."* That doesn't mean you won't struggle sin anymore, but it does mean you have a choice in the struggle against sin. The Son has set you free. Remain in him.

There is no reason for us to boast or brag of our status as sons but we can patiently deal with those outside of God's family and remember how we too were once slaves. But now we've been given a new family, a new father, and we are sons – not because we are sexist but because at that time sons were heirs and that's who you are. Be sons, be like your father. Do the work of your father, who has a desire to save those enslaved in sin. You are your father's son or daughter.

Like Father, like son takes on a positive meaning. Jesus also turns over the idea of what it means to be a father. They say the way fathers treat their children determines their view of their heavenly "Father." But God is the ultimate father and the example that fathers are to imitate. We have a father who loves us. We have his son who died for us. That is our father. You are his child. Amen.