



## BACKGROUND FOR THE BIBLE PASSAGES

### Session 2: Finding Truth

We are living in a culture where truth is no longer a black and white issue. Individuals and special interest groups shape the truth to fit their own desires and opinions. There is no consistent standard by which truth is judged and, consequently, there is no clear definition of right and wrong. However, God does not advertise multiple versions of the truth. As intolerant as it may seem in this pluralistic society, God's Word is unmistakably clear on this subject. There is only one truth and it can be found in only one place—the person of Jesus Christ as revealed through the Word of God.

#### John 8:30-47

- When we look to God, we discover the truth.
- Sin will keep us from seeing truth.
- Our own opinions can keep us from seeing God's truth.

Just before He uttered the powerful words found in John 8:30-47, Jesus had been speaking to the crowds as they gathered around and listened intently to His teaching. Some of the things He said prompted arguments and dissension because not everyone agreed with Him. In fact, there were some pretty intense discussions that immediately preceded the events in this passage. However, some of the people who had been following Jesus and listening to His message were persuaded to believe. John said that while Jesus was in the middle of His sermon, people in the crowd began to connect with Him and buy into His teaching. As a result, they put their faith in Jesus and began to follow Him.

After persuading this brand new group of converts, Jesus focused all His attention on them and their journey of faith. He addressed them as His *potential* disciples, urging them to realize that their faith had not yet been tested, or proven genuine. They had heard only one sermon and decided to follow Jesus based on that experience alone. He knew that in every group of responders, some had not yet counted the cost and, therefore, would not finish the race. There were others whose interest grew out of curiosity rather than commitment. So Jesus gave them one clear and unmistakable litmus test to determine whose faith was authentic and whose was not.

Longevity is the evidence that our faith is real. Jesus said that only those who *continue* in His Word are true disciples. The picture Jesus was painting is similar to a marathon, where masses of people are bunched up shoulder to shoulder at the starting point. But the finish line is altogether different because only a fraction of those who enter the race are physically able to complete it. Jesus said that a true disciple would remain connected to His Word for an entire lifetime. His Jewish audience understood the contrast with their current educational system. Jewish children studied in school for a specified number of years and then became apprentices to gain practical experience before entering the workforce. Unlike their limited season of study, true discipleship involved a lifetime of devotion to God's Word.

It is essential to clarify what Jesus meant when He spoke of abiding, or continuing in His Word. He referred to the result and not the basis of our faith. In other words, we're not right with God because we remain connected to His Word, but we remain connected to His Word because we're right with Him. Also, true disciples of Christ consider His Word to be the eternal and unchanging standard of truth. That means whenever we encounter conflict with Scripture, the Word of God is always our final authority. Culture often contradicts the truth of God's Word, and our thoughts and feelings will tell us things that are foreign to the mind of God. Therefore, we have to identify God as the Source of truth who will always guide us to right thinking and right doing.

Jesus did not say that freedom comes through knowing the *Word*, but through knowing the *truth*. That's because we encounter the person of Jesus Christ through the Word of God as it uncovers and illuminates truth. So the motivation for studying Scripture is not just for gaining information, but inspiration as well. If we research and analyze the Bible simply to gain additional knowledge, we may discern facts, but we'll never discover truth.

When the Word introduces us to the truth of God through the person of Jesus, then we will experience genuine freedom. Jesus said that truth can destroy the chains that keep us from experiencing abundant life—life the way God intended it to be. Sin is what

produces failure, prejudice, lust, addiction, bitterness, and every other form of evil that enslaves us. It is what holds us captive to a life of mediocrity when we were created for greatness. Sin will keep us from seeing truth. The good news is that we don't have to serve a life sentence in this prison, because Jesus has given us the key to freedom. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

The Jews, also identified in this chapter as Pharisees (vv. 3,13), were highly offended when Jesus implied that they were in some kind of bondage. They were so impassioned by their desire to be right that they shaded the truth of their past. The Jews claimed that because they were descendants of Abraham, they had never been in slavery to anyone. And yet, history tells a very different story. Over the years, the Israelites had been conquered and enslaved by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and they were currently under the yoke of the Roman Empire. The Pharisees' reaction to the words of Jesus revealed that their thinking was polluted by ignorance as well as arrogance. As usual, they misinterpreted His message because they were thinking in the *physical* realm, but Jesus was speaking about *spiritual* things. Likewise, clinging to our own opinions can keep us from seeing God's truth.

The Jews couldn't imagine how God would allow His chosen nation to be enslaved by anyone or anything. After all, they were totally unlike the pagans who disregarded the law and practiced idolatrous worship. However, Jesus demolished the dividing line used to separate the Jews and pagans when He said that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. To clarify further His message, Jesus contrasted the positions of a slave and a son within the family unit. A slave was a temporary part of a household, while a son was a permanent member of a home. That meant a slave could be sold at the master's discretion, regardless of his job performance or his personal preference. There was no other profession in New Testament times with as little job security as slavery. On the other hand, a son remained part of the family forever because of his relationship to his father.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus explained that membership in His family was validated by obedience, not genealogy (v. 31). Then He confronted the reality of sin in the lives of those who claimed to live in freedom. Therefore, the Pharisees could not hang their hats on heritage without holiness as the foundation of

their faith. As slaves to sin, their physical relationship with Abraham was not enough to earn them a position in God's eternal kingdom. Only when they demonstrated the faith of Abraham could they gain favor in the eyes of God and a permanent place in His family. Jesus boldly confronted the Jews, describing their reaction to His message and ministry as one of fury rather than faith. He exposed the avid anger that prompted them to entertain thoughts of murder. And then He dropped the bomb! Jesus accused them of acting in response to their father just as He acted in response to His. He was implying that since God was His Father, the Pharisees could not also be children of God. This statement set the scene for Jesus to later identify and describe their father.

There was hostility in their voices as the Pharisees argued that Abraham was indeed their father. This was a fundamental issue for them since they had built an entire theology on their religious heritage. But the two things that always distinguish children as part of a certain family are resemblance and imitation. Children generally look, walk, talk, and act a lot like their parents. The Jews may have been Abraham's descendants, but they were certainly not his children since they did not take after or follow after him. In fact, they were plotting to kill Jesus, who was the promised seed of Abraham, through whom the entire world would be blessed (Gal. 3:16). Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham and yet the Pharisees wanted to destroy Him. Therefore, if their attitudes and actions could be so different from those of Abraham, the Jews would have to look for their names on someone else's family tree.

The response of the Pharisees was one of sarcasm and mockery. It's as if they were saying, "We're not illegitimate children like you are." There were plenty of raised eyebrows and lots of juicy gossip about the fact that Mary was not married when she became pregnant with Jesus. This was their way of attacking His credibility since He was attacking their identity. When they made an even more zealous claim that God alone was their Father, Jesus gave unmistakably clear evidence to the contrary.

First of all, if God were their Father, they would have loved His Son. Jesus told the Pharisees that He came from God, meaning that He was the physical expression of God in the world. If the Pharisees had truly belonged to God, they would have recognized His character and personality in the life of Jesus.

Secondly, if God were their Father, they would have understood His message proclaimed by Jesus. Instead, they stumbled over everything He said because they didn't understand the language of the family. When he talked about bread, they took Him literally, and when He spoke of water, they never dreamed He was speaking about the Spirit. They could not receive His words because they would not accept His ideology.

After Jesus established that the Pharisees were not children of God, He proceeded to identify their father as the devil. That doesn't mean they were born of the devil like believers are born of God, but they were children of the devil by imitation. Satan's two character traits most imitated by the Pharisees were murder and lying. Satan has been a murderer from the very beginning when he brought death to Adam and all humanity. The Jews carried on the family tradition as they systematically strategized to murder Jesus. They followed in the footsteps of the father of lies when they claimed God as their only Father. When Jesus countered each of their lies with words of truth, the Pharisees held to their traditions and refused to believe. In doing so, they provided Jesus with the strongest evidence in His case against them.

## **John 14:6**

### **•Jesus is the Truth.**

One of Jesus' statements that has caused major controversy over the years is His claim to be the sole Source of truth in the world. He actually had the nerve to tell His disciples they would never get to God without experiencing a personal relationship with His Son. These radical statements rocked the world since the Pharisees and others had been counting on heritage and good works to earn them favor with God. Like many people today, they were not consciously abandoning the truth, but they had chosen to believe a lie instead. Truth is a lot like light. When you walk into a dark room and turn the light on, the darkness disappears. That's because light and darkness cannot coexist, and the same principle applies to truth and lies. The existence of one demands the extinction of the other. Therefore, Jesus is the standard of truth through whom all other thoughts, ideas, and beliefs must be filtered. He *is* the Truth.