

## Study Nine True Disciples

### *Disciple*

*One who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another.*

“In John, knowledge of God cannot be separated from obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

John chapter eight, like much of the content of John’s gospel, contains a confrontation between Jesus and the Jews. This time, He is in Jerusalem, where the Pharisees (the religious elite) and the Sadducees (the political elite) are headquartered. He has a run in with the Pharisees near the beginning of the chapter and throughout the rest of the passage it is unclear if He continues to address them, but we know that He included other Jewish men in the discussion. The topic this time was the Jews’ beloved heritage, or so they thought.

From a western perspective, it is difficult to understand how important heritage was to a Jewish man or woman in Jesus’ day. One reason genealogies permeate the Bible is the high regard the people of Israel had for their forefathers and their lines. This reverence was prompted, largely, by the fact that their heritage determined whether or not they were true Jews, the chosen people of God. Understandably, this was a big deal to the men Jesus was speaking with and He knew just

how to highlight this particular issue and bring the truth to light.

“If you will hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” Jesus said “to the Jews who had believed him.”<sup>2</sup> Here Jesus lays out the heart of what it means to be His disciple: holding to His teaching. Unfortunately, the immediate response of His listeners here is to balk at His teaching. “Free!” they said, “we’ve never been slaves to anyone!” They were, of course, not talking about physical, political, or economic slavery, for they had been enslaved, as a people group, to virtually every major power in that region of the world, “Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria and Rome had all held the Jews in political captivity.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus was, instead, speaking of a spiritual captivity. The Jews rebutted His statement with their standard response, that they were sons of Abraham, that is, those who inherit both the law and the promise. They believed they were free because they had the law and someday there would be a Messiah that set them free politically as well.

But Jesus is neither distracted by nor satisfied with their self-assurance. Instead, He challenged them by telling a mini-parable and explaining that there is a profound and obvious distinction between being a slave and a son, one they had missed. “For Jesus, then, the ultimate bondage is not enslavement to a political or economic system, but vicious slavery to moral failure, to rebellion against the God who has

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, D.A. p. 356

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<sup>2</sup> John 8:31-32 NIV

<sup>3</sup> Carson, D.A. p. 349

made us.”<sup>4</sup> He was saying, “Though you may have the law and the promise, you benefit from neither and understand none of what has been made available to you. You think you are a permanent part of God’s family because of your efforts, but even those are imperfect and completely ineffective in securing your place in the family.”

He went on to explain that though these Jewish men thought that they were the sons of God, they had no part with God and no place in His family because they had chosen to walk in darkness, showing who their true father was by their actions. In fact, Jesus even went so far as to say that they were sons of the devil! “This is no gentle, devotional discussion of deep personal religious truth, set within a framework of civility and mutual respect: this is a man facing a crowd set upon lynching him, and bravely speaking up against their hypocrisy.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus had offended practically everyone there, showing their actual lack of faith. From the beginning He had said, “If you will hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples...” We see here that these men were unwilling to hold to Jesus’ teaching because it did not suit their preconceived notions of who they were and what they needed. “The flaw is therefore not with the communicator, but with those whose values and prejudices make them constitutionally unable to ‘hear.’”<sup>6</sup>

The conclusion then, since they were not willing to hear is that they wanted no part of the truth, and because they did not desire truth, they were not of God. “Yet because I tell the truth,

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, D.A. p. 350

<sup>5</sup> Wright, N.T. p. 127

<sup>6</sup> Carson, D.A. p. 353

you do not believe me! ...If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”<sup>7</sup> Scholar D.A. Carson comments on this passage, “The first clause is not concessive (*‘although I tell the truth’*) but causal: *‘because I tell the truth, you do not believe in me.’* The children of God so love the truth that they will believe in Jesus; the children of the devil will be so characterized by lies that they will not be able to accept the truth precisely *because it is the truth.*”<sup>8</sup>

It would be easy to look down upon the Jewish men here who seemed so out of touch with what Jesus was actually saying, who let their own ideas, desires, and motives stop their ears from hearing the truth. But in fact, we must examine ourselves truly and ask if we are not also these same men who come to Jesus “believing in Him,” but yet who are unwilling to hold to His teaching. Perhaps we too allow our prejudices and ideas of how the world works to prevent us from hearing God’s voice and embracing truth. We must allow Him to strip from us every hindrance and every sin that would entangle us if we are to follow after Jesus. Otherwise, we will be just the same as the men to whom Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am now here. ... Why is my language unclear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.”<sup>9</sup>

### Scripture Reading: NIV

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<sup>7</sup> John 8:46-47

<sup>8</sup> Carson, D.A. p. 353-354

<sup>9</sup> John 8:42-44

### **John 8:31-59**

<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. <sup>37</sup>I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. <sup>38</sup>I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father." <sup>39</sup>"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. <sup>40</sup>As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. <sup>41</sup>You are doing the works of your own father." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." <sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. <sup>43</sup>Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. <sup>44</sup>You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup>Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! <sup>46</sup>Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the

truth, why don't you believe me? <sup>47</sup>Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." <sup>48</sup>The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" <sup>49</sup>"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. <sup>50</sup>I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. <sup>51</sup>Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." <sup>52</sup>At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. <sup>53</sup>Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" <sup>54</sup>Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. <sup>55</sup>Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. <sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." <sup>57</sup>"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" <sup>58</sup>"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" <sup>59</sup>At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

### **Scripture Meditation:**

*John 8:31-32 "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"*

### **Partner Assignment:**

Meet with your prayer partner from this week and read Chapter Eight of the Gospel of John. Answer the following questions together:

- A. What does this chapter teach us about following Jesus?
- B. What does this chapter teach us about our roles in Jesus' Kingdom?
- C. What specifically from this chapter challenges you and why?
- D. What questions or comments do you have for Life Group next week about this chapter? (Make note of them to ask at the beginning of next week's study)

### **GOJ Study Nine, Sample Questions for Discussion:**

#### Pre-Article Questions:

1. For those of you who did the prayer partners assignment, would you share one thing you discovered together this week from the reading and discussion of John Chapter Seven.
2. How has learning about Jesus in college, and what a true follower of Him is to be, caused you to think differently about Christianity?

#### Post-Article Questions:

1. Do you know people, or have you at some point been someone, who claims to believe in Jesus but doesn't obey His teaching? How have you justified this action in your own mind?

#### Post-Scripture Reading Questions:

1. What do you think it means to hold to Jesus' teachings? Look at other translations to get a more full picture of what Jesus was saying here.
2. Jesus said to those who believed in Him that a true disciple would hold to His teaching or abide in His word. How is that applicable to us today?
3. What are some practical ways that you have found to abide in Jesus' word, or to hold to His teaching?
4. Jesus has some pretty harsh words for those who do not hold His teaching or believe that He is speaking the truth. Do you believe He is speaking the truth? How does that belief affect your life and choices?
5. What does it look like to be a slave to sin? Read Romans 6:15-23.
6. Have you ever found yourself in a position where you felt like a slave to sin? How do you overcome those moments?
7. What does it mean for you to be a son or daughter of God, rather than a slave?
8. Is there anything in your life that you cling to, like the Jewish leaders' claims that they were sons of Abraham, that you value more highly than the truth and grace found in Christ? If so, how can you depose these idols in your life practically speaking and spiritually?