

TRUE CHILDREN OF GOD

Q: True or False? “How you relate to someone depends on who you understand them to be.” What are some examples? Ever make some embarrassing incorrect assumptions?

Although all people are made in God’s image and therefore valuable this statement is True. If they are a person of authority, they may deserve your respect and submission. If they are someone who has shown themselves a fool, their advice is not to be taken. A lot of what occur when we meet new people is determining how we should relate to that person. How many people have had an awkward moment when they found out the person they assumed was the secretary was actually the boss?

Application in this passage—various groups of Jews respond differently to Jesus depending on who they thought him to be.

READ John 8:31–59 (ESV)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Are the people Jesus is talking to in verses 31-59 the same as those mentioned in verse 30?

Maybe but not necessarily. The references in this chapter can be a bit confusing. Some believe that Jesus is talking to his disciples but being interrupted by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. However, it seems that what this passage shows us is that these fickle believers are a lot like those at the feedings at the Sea of Galilee, they “believe” in Jesus, but not really...by the end of this passage they’re ready to kill him.

2. Many people quote verse 32. However, Jesus places a condition on this verse. What is it?

If you hold to my teaching (abide in my word, ESV), and are my disciple → then you will know the truth.

3. How have you been set free from sin by the truth of Jesus Christ?

Freedom from a deceptive worldview, freedom from destructive choices, free from the consequence and the bondage of sin.

4. The people respond that they are already free because they had never been a slave to anyone. Was this true? What was Jesus’ response to their claim? To whom are they enslaved? Who is their father?

These Jews are not so good at history. They were slaves in Egypt. Since the time of Babylon (~600 BC) they had nearly always been under the dominion of some other nation.

5. Are we surrounded by people who are enslaved? Are we burdened for them?
What should we be doing for them?

Yes, their ears are stopped and their eyes are veiled by their father, the father of lies. Free the zombies!

I hope we are burdened, but too often I know I am not. I too easily forget what it must be like to not know the truth, to be walking in darkness and ignorance.

Show them a better way. Explicitly and implicitly by example. Pray for them. Pray for a burden for them,

6. Jesus' opponents also claim to have both Abraham and God as their father.
According to Jesus, how does their conduct contradict their claim (v. 39-47)?
Why is our conduct the truest test of our beliefs?

Conduct often shows the truest level of belief.

7. In v. 42 Jesus says "If God were your Father, you would love me." Note that he doesn't say "obey me." Is there any significance?

Our passionate love for Him naturally includes obedience out of a joyful heart. God doesn't want to come give you a list, He wants to share "living streams of water" that will flow from within you, blessing you and those around you.

8. What is the mark of someone who is "of God"? Read John 8:47. If someone were to look at your life, would they be able to say that God was your father? What would need to change for people to know that you are a child of God?

Someone who "hears God." Makes me think of my kids: "Did you hear me?!" I'm not saying that when they're obedient....

9. When we follow our own desires, who do we declare as our father?

Satan

10. What is significant about the Jews statements in v. 48? How does Jesus respond?

This is worse slur that they can possibly conceive of. He mostly ignores it. FYI, people misunderstood and slandered Jesus, they will do the same to you.

11. From verse 56, why would Abraham rejoice to see Jesus' day?

Many possible reasons, interesting to see how they class will respond.

12. Why is verse 58 so important? Why do the Jews pick up stones to kill Jesus after this, how did they understand his statement?

This isn't just Jesus saying he had pre-existence. This is "God talk" that mirrors the words of God from the burning bush: tell them I AM sent you...

The Jews knew what he meant. Although carrying out an execution was not allowed under Roman occupation, they didn't care if they were hauled off themselves, they were going to kill this upstart who claimed to be God.

Freedom and Bondage (John 8:31–47)

What listeners are represented by the pronoun “they” in John 8:33? In the previous verses, Jesus addressed the “believers” mentioned in John 8:30, and He warned them that continuance in the Word—discipleship—was proof of true salvation. When we obey His Word, we grow in spiritual knowledge; and as we grow in spiritual knowledge, we grow in freedom from sin. Life leads to learning, and learning leads to liberty.

It is not likely that the pronoun *they* refers to these new believers, for they would probably not argue with their Saviour! If John 8:37 is any guide, “they” probably refers to the same unbelieving Jewish leaders who had opposed Jesus throughout this conversation (John 8:13, 19, 22, 25). As before, they did not understand His message. Jesus was speaking about true spiritual freedom, freedom from sin, but they were thinking about political freedom.

Their claim that Abraham’s descendants had never been in bondage was certainly a false one that was refuted by the very record in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Jews had been enslaved by seven mighty nations, as recorded in the Book of Judges. The ten Northern tribes had been carried away captive by Assyria, and the two Southern tribes had

gone into seventy years of captivity in Babylon. And at that very hour, the Jews were under the iron heel of Rome! How difficult it is for proud religious people to admit their failings and their needs!

Jesus explained that the difference between spiritual freedom and bondage is a matter of whether one is a son or a servant. The servant may live in the house, but he is not a part of the family; and he cannot be guaranteed a future. (Jesus may have had Isaac and Ishmael in mind here; see Gen. 21.) “Whosoever keeps on practicing sin [literal translation] is the servant of sin.” These religious leaders would not only *die* in their sins (John 8:21, 24), but they were right then *living* in bondage to sin!

How can slaves of sin be set free? Only by the Son. How does He do it? Through the power of His Word. Note the emphasis on the Word in John 8:38–47, and He had already told them, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). They would not “make room” for His Word in their hearts.

In the rest of this section, you see the debate centering around the word *father*. Jesus identified Himself with the Father in heaven, but He identified them with the father from hell, Satan. Of course, the Jews claimed Abraham as their father (Luke 3:8ff), but Jesus made a careful dis-

inction between “Abraham’s seed” (physical descendants) and “Abraham’s children” (spiritual descendants because of personal faith; [Gal. 3:6–14](#)).

These Jewish leaders, who claimed to belong to Abraham, were very unlike Abraham. For one thing, they wanted to kill Jesus; Abraham was the “friend of God” and fellowshiped with Him in love ([Isa. 41:8](#)). Abraham listened to God’s truth and obeyed it, but these religious leaders rejected the truth.

Nature is determined by birth, and birth is determined by paternity. If God is your Father, then you share God’s nature ([2 Peter 1:1–4](#)); but if Satan is your father, then you share in his evil nature. Our Lord did not say that *every* lost sinner is a “child of the devil,” though every lost sinner is certainly a child of wrath and disobedience ([Eph. 2:1–3](#)). Both here and in the Parable of the Tares ([Matt. 13:24–32, 36–43](#)), Jesus said that the Pharisees and other “counterfeit” believers were the children of the devil. Satan is an imitator ([2 Cor. 11:13–15](#)), and he gives his children a false righteousness that can never gain them entrance into heaven ([Rom. 10:1–4](#)).

What were the characteristics of these religious leaders who belonged to the devil? For one thing, they rejected the truth ([John 8:40](#)) and tried to kill Jesus

because He spoke the truth. They did not love God ([John 8:42](#)) nor could they understand what Jesus taught ([John 8:43, 47](#)). Satan’s children may be well versed in their religious traditions, but they have no understanding of the Word of God.

Satan is a liar and a murderer. He lied to our first parents (“Yea, hath God said?”) and engineered their deaths. Cain was a child of the devil ([1 John 3:12](#)), for he was both a liar and a murderer. He killed his brother Abel and then lied about it ([Gen. 4](#)). Is it any wonder that these religious leaders lied about Jesus, hired false witnesses, and then had Him killed?

The worst bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. **The Pharisees and other religious leaders thought that they were free, but they were actually enslaved in terrible spiritual bondage to sin and Satan. They would not face the truth, and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free.**

Honor and Dishonor ([John 8:48–59](#))

The leaders could not refute our Lord’s statements, so they attacked His person. Some students think that the leaders’ statement in [John 8:41](#)—“We are not born of fornication”—was a slur on our Lord’s own birth and character. After all, Mary

was with child before she and Joseph were married. But the personal attacks in [John 8:48](#) are quite obvious. For a Jew to be called a Samaritan was the grossest of insults, and then to be called a demon-possessed person only added further insult.

Note that Jesus did not even dignify the racial slur with an answer. (No doubt there was also in this the suggestion that, like the Samaritans, Jesus was a heretic.) They were dishonoring Him, but He was honoring the Father. You will recall that He made it clear that it was impossible to honor the Father without honoring the Son ([John 5:23](#)). They were seeking their own glory (see [John 5:41-44](#)), but He was seeking the glory that belongs to God alone. Tradition-centered religion, without Christ, is often a “mutual admiration society” for people who want the praise of men.

Jesus had warned them that they would die in their sins because of their unbelief, and now He invited them to trust His Word and “never see death” ([John 8:51](#)). He had said this before in His synagogue sermon ([John 6:39-40, 44, 54](#)). Once again, the leaders lacked the spiritual insight to understand what He was saying. Abraham was dead, yet he was a godly man; and the faithful prophets were also dead. This kind of talk

only convinced them the more that He had a demon! ([John 7:20](#))

By claiming to be the Lord of death, He was claiming to be God ([John 5:21-29](#)). This was not an honor He made for Himself; the Father gave it to Him. In fact, Abraham (whom they claimed as their father) saw His day and rejoiced! Instead of rejoicing, they were revolting and trying to kill Him.

How did Abraham “see” our Lord’s day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith ([Heb. 11:10, 13-16](#)). God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord’s life and ministry, but He did give him the spiritual perception to “see” these future events. Certainly Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah in the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. He certainly saw Calvary when he offered Isaac to God ([Gen. 22](#)). In the priestly ministry of Melchizedek ([Gen. 14:17-24](#)), Abraham could see the heavenly priesthood of the Lord. In the marriage of Isaac, Abraham could see a picture of the marriage of the Lamb ([Gen. 24](#)).

His statement found in [John 8:58](#) can be translated, “Before Abraham came into being, I AM.” Again, this was another affirmation of His divine sonship; and the Jewish leaders received it as such. He had once again made Himself equal with God

([John 5:18](#)), and this was the sin of blasphemy, worthy of death ([Lev. 24:16](#)). Jesus was divinely protected and simply walked away. His hour had not yet come. We cannot help but admire His courage as He presented the truth and invited blind religious men to trust Him and be set free.

The most difficult people to win to the Saviour are those who do not realize that they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion to save them. They are walking in the darkness and not following the light of life. They are sharing a “living death” because of their bondage to sin; and, in spite of their religious deeds, they are dishonoring the Father and the Son. These are the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and Jesus called them the children of the devil.

Whose child are you? Is God your Father because you have received Jesus Christ into your life? ([John 1:12–13](#)) Or is Satan your father because you are depending on a counterfeit righteousness, a “works righteousness,” not the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ?

If God is your Father, then heaven is your home. If He is not your Father, then hell is your destiny.

It is truly a matter of life or death!

NOTE: As a teacher you should know something about the contested passage of John 7:53-8:11, although we are not covering it in class.

FROM THE ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTES:

7:53–8:11 There is considerable doubt that this story is part of John’s original Gospel, for it is absent from all of the oldest manuscripts. But there is nothing in it unworthy of sound doctrine. It seems best to view the story as something that probably happened during Jesus’ ministry but that was not originally part of what John wrote in his Gospel. Therefore it should not be considered as part of Scripture and should not be used as the basis for building any point of doctrine unless confirmed in Scripture.

(We might do well to apply that thinking to most of scripture; we would avoid a lot of bad “one-verse” theology!)

Some have claimed that the early church felt like this was a true story, but they didn’t know where to put it.

For detailed analysis, see the following article from noted scholar of New Testament manuscripts, Dr. Daniel Wallace.

-Scott

My Favorite Passage that's Not in the Bible

Daniel B. Wallace, PhD

Executive Director,
Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (www.csntm.org)

One hundred and forty years ago, conservative biblical scholar and Dean of Canterbury, Henry Alford, advocated a new translation to replace the King James Bible. One of his reasons was the inferior textual basis of the KJV. Alford argued that “a translator of Holy Scripture must be...ready to sacrifice the choicest text, and the plainest proof of doctrine, if the words are not those of what he is constrained in his conscience to receive as God’s testimony.” He was speaking about the Trinitarian formula found in the KJV rendering of 1 John 5:7–8. Twenty years later, two Cambridge scholars came to the firm conclusion that John 7:53–8:11 also was not part of the original text of scripture. But Westcott and Hort’s view has not had nearly the impact that Alford’s did.

For a long time, biblical scholars have recognized the poor textual credentials of the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11). The evidence against its authenticity is overwhelming: The earliest manuscripts with substantial portions of John’s Gospel (P66 and P75) lack these verses. They skip from John 7:52 to 8:12. The oldest large codices of the Bible also lack these verses: codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both from the fourth century, are normally considered to be the most important biblical manuscripts of the NT extant today. Neither of them has these verses. Codex Alexandrinus, from the fifth century, lacks several leaves in the middle of John. But because of the consistency of the letter size, width of lines, and lines per page, the evidence is conclusive that this manuscript also lacked the *pericope adulterae*. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, also from the fifth century, apparently lacked these verses as well (it is similar to Alexandrinus in that some leaves are missing). The earliest extant manuscript to have these verses is codex Bezae, an eccentric text once in the possession of Theodore Beza. He gave this manuscript to the University of Cambridge in 1581 as a gift, telling the school that he was confident that the scholars there would be able to figure out its significance. He washed his hands of the document. Bezae is indeed the most eccentric NT manuscript extant today, yet it is the chief representative of the Western text-type (the text-form that became dominant in Rome and the Latin West).

When P66, P75, Sinaiticus, and Vaticanus agree, their combined testimony is overwhelmingly strong that a particular reading is not authentic. But it is not only the early Greek manuscripts that lack this text. The great majority of Greek manuscripts through the first eight centuries lack this pericope. And except for Bezae (or codex D), virtually all of the most important Greek witnesses through the first eight centuries do not have the verses. Of the three most important early versions of the New Testament (Coptic, Latin, Syriac), two of them lack the story in their earliest and best witnesses. The Latin alone has the story in its best early witnesses.

Even patristic writers seemed to overlook this text. Bruce Metzger, arguably the greatest textual critic of the twentieth century, argued that “No Greek Church Father prior to Euthymius Zigabenus (twelfth century) comments on the passage, and Euthymius declares that the accurate copies of the Gospel do not contain it” (*Textual Commentary*, 2nd ed., *loc. cit.*).

It is an important point to note that although the story of the woman caught in adultery is found in most of our printed Bibles today, the evidence suggests that the majority of Bibles during the first eight centuries of the Christian faith did not contain the story. Externally, most scholars would say that the evidence for it not being an authentic part of John’s Gospel is rock solid.

But textual criticism is not based on external evidence alone; there is also the internal evidence to consider. This is comprised of two parts: *intrinsic evidence* has to do with what an author is likely to have written; *transcriptional evidence* has to do with how and why a scribe would have changed the text.

Intrinsically, the vocabulary, syntax, and style look far more like Luke than they do John. There is almost nothing in these twelve verses that has a Johannine flavor. And transcriptionally, scribes were almost always prone to add material rather than omit it—especially a big block of text such as this, rich in

its description of Jesus' mercy. One of the remarkable things about this passage, in fact, is that it is found in multiple locations. Most manuscripts that have it place it in its now traditional location: between John 7:52 and 8:12. But an entire family of manuscripts has the passage at the end of Luke 21, while another family places it at the end of John's Gospel. Other manuscripts place it at the end of Luke or in various places in John 7.

The *pericope adulterae* has all the earmarks of a pericope that was looking for a home. It took up permanent residence, in the ninth century, in the middle of the fourth gospel.

If the question of its literary authenticity (i.e., whether it was penned by John) is settled, the question of its *historical* authenticity is not. It is indeed possible that these verses describe an actual incident in the life of Jesus and found their way into our Bibles because of having the ring of truth. On one level, if this is the case, then one might be forgiven for preaching the text on a Sunday morning. But to regard it as scripture *if* John did not write it is another matter. The problem is this: If John wrote his gospel as a tightly woven argument, with everything meeting a crescendo in the resurrection, would he be disturbed that some scribes started monkeying with his text? If we don't respect the human author, then we could discount this issue. But if the Bible is *both* the Word of God *and* the words of men, then we are playing fast and loose with the human author's purpose by adding anything—especially something as long as this passage—that takes a detour from his intentions. What preacher would be happy with someone adding a couple hundred words in the middle of his printed sermon as though such were from him? On another level, there is evidence that this story is a conflation from two different stories, one circulating in the east and the other circulating in the west. In other words, even the historicity of this pericope is called into question.

Yet, remarkably, even though most translators would probably deny John 7:53–8:11 a place in the canon, virtually every translation of the Bible has this text in its traditional location. There is, of course, a marginal note in modern translations that says something like, "Most ancient authorities lack these verses." But such a weak and ambiguous statement is generally ignored by readers of Holy Writ. (It's ambiguous because many readers might assume that in spite of the 'ancient authorities' that lack the passage, the translators felt it must be authentic.)

How, then, has this passage made it into modern translations? In a word, there has been a longstanding *tradition of timidity* among translators. One twentieth-century Bible relegated the passage to the footnotes, but when the sales were rather lackluster, it again found its place in John's Gospel. Even the NET Bible (available at www.bible.org), for which I am the senior New Testament editor, has put the text in its traditional place. But the NET Bible also has a lengthy footnote, explaining the textual complications and doubts about its authenticity. And the font size is smaller than normal so that it will be harder to read from the pulpit! But we nevertheless made the same concession that other translators have about this text by leaving it *in situ*.

The climate has changed recently, however. In Bart Ehrman's 2005 bestseller, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, the author discounts the authenticity of this pericope. What is remarkable is not that he does this, but that thousands of Bible-believing Christians have become disturbed by his assertions. Ehrman—a former evangelical and alum of Moody and Wheaton—is one of America's leading textual critics. He has been on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines, and on the Internet. He has lectured at universities from sea to shining sea. What he wrote in his blockbuster book sent shockwaves through the Christian public.

I wrote a critique of Ehrman's book that was published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. There I said, "keeping [John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20] in our Bibles rather than relegating them to the footnotes seems to have been a bomb just waiting to explode. All Ehrman did was to light the fuse. One lesson we must learn from *Misquoting Jesus* is that those in ministry need to close the gap between the church and the academy. We have to educate believers. Instead of trying to isolate laypeople from critical scholarship, we need to insulate them. They need to be ready for the barrage, because it is coming. The intentional dumbing down of the church for the sake of filling more pews will ultimately lead to defection from Christ. Ehrman is to be thanked for giving us a wake-up call."

I believe it's time for us to own up to our tradition of timidity and recognize that this has not helped the Church in the long haul. It's time to close the gap. I am calling for translators to remove this text from the Gospel of John and relegate it to the footnotes. Although this will be painful and will cause initial

confusion, it is far better that laypeople hear the truth about scripture from their friends than from their enemies. They need to know that Christ-honoring, Bible-believing scholars *also* do not think that this text is authentic, and that such a stance has not shaken their faith one iota. No cardinal truth is lost if these verses go bye-bye; no essential doctrine is disturbed if they are cut from the pages of the Word of God. (Of course, if it is objected that since scholars are not absolutely sure that this text is inauthentic they therefore need to retain it in the text, it need only be said that such a policy practiced across the board would wreak havoc on our printed Bibles and would mushroom their size beyond recognizable proportions. In Acts alone, one textual tradition has 8.5% more material than has been traditionally printed in our Bibles, yet very few object to such variants being denied a place in the canon. Thus, to insist on having the *pericope adulterae* in a footnote is a nod toward its longstanding tradition in Bibles from the second millennium AD on.)

Of course, King James Only advocates will see things differently. Their claim is that modern translations are butchering the Bible by cutting out major texts. Not only is that quite an overstatement (since only *two* lengthy passages in the KJV NT are considered spurious by modern scholars—John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20), but it also assumes what it needs to prove. Is it not possible that the KJV, based on half a dozen late manuscripts, has *added* to the Word of God rather than that modern translations, based on far more and much earlier manuscripts, have cut out portions of scripture? It is demonstrable that over time, the New Testament text has grown. The latest manuscripts have approximately 2% more material than the earliest ones. The problem is not that we have 98% of the Word of God; the problem is that we have 102%! Modern scholars are trying to burn off the dross to get to the gold. And one text that must go, in spite of our emotional attachment to it, is John 7:53–8:11.

One of the practical implications of this is as follows: When Christians are asked whether this beloved story should be cut out of their Bibles, they overwhelmingly and emphatically say *no*. The reason given: It's always been in the Bible and scholars have no right to tamper with the text. The problem with this view is manifold. First, it is historically naïve because it assumes that this passage has always been in the Bible. Second, it is anti-intellectual by assuming that scholars are involved in some sort of conspiracy and that they have no basis for excising verses that exist in the *printed* text of the Bible. Without the slightest shred of evidence, many laypeople (and not a few pastors!) have a knee-jerk reaction to scholars who believe that these twelve verses are not authentic. What they don't realize is that every Bible translation has to be reconstructed from the extant Greek New Testament manuscripts. No one follows just a single manuscript, because all manuscripts are riddled with errors. The manuscripts need to be examined, weighed, sifted, and eventually translated. Every textual decision requires someone to think through which reading is authentic and which is not. In the best tradition of solid Christian scholarship, textual critics are actually producing a Bible for Christians to read. Without biblical scholars, we would have no Bibles in our own languages. When laymen claim that scholars are tampering with the text, they are biting the hand that feeds them. Now, to be sure, there *are* biblical scholars who are attempting to destroy the Christian faith. And there are textual critics who are not Christians. But the great translations of our time have largely been done by honest scholars. Some of them are Christians, and some of them are not. But their integrity as scholars cannot be called into question when it comes to passages such as the *pericope adulterae*, since they are simply following in the train of Henry Alford by subjecting their conscience to the historical data.

The best of biblical scholarship pursues truth at all costs. And it bases its conclusions on real evidence, not on wishes, emotion, or blind faith. This is in line with the key tenets of historic Christianity: If God became man in time-space history, then we ought to link our faith to history. It must not be a leap of faith, but it should be a step of faith. The religion of the Bible is the only major religion in the world that subjects itself to historical inquiry. The Incarnation has forever put God's stamp of approval on pursuing truth, wrestling with data, and changing our minds based on evidence. When we deny evidence its place and appeal to emotion instead, we are *methodologically* denying the significance of the Incarnation. Much is thus at stake when it comes to a text such as the story of the woman caught in adultery. What is at stake is not, as some might think, the mercy of God; rather, what is at stake is how we view the very Incarnation itself. Ironically, if we allow passages into the Gospels that do not have the best credentials, we are in fact tacitly questioning whether the Lord of the Gospels, Jesus Christ himself, became man, for we jettison historicity in favor of personal preference. By affirming a spurious passage about him we may be losing a whole lot more than we gain.

It is the duty of pastors for the sake of their faith to study the data, to know the evidence, to have firm convictions rooted in history. And we dare not serve up anything less than the same kind of meal for our congregations. We do not serve the church of Jesus Christ faithfully when we hide evidence from laypeople; we need to learn to insulate our congregations, but not isolate them. The Incarnation of Christ demands nothing less than this.

<https://bible.org/article/my-favorite-passage-thats-not-bible>

Published: June 24 2008