

Throughout most of John 8, the Jews are having an argument with Jesus, and it centers around one question: Who is your father? Is it God? Is it Abraham? Is it the devil? It's an enormously important question for many reasons, and not just for those Jews, but for everyone, for you today. So, who is your father?

Before we answer that, let's consider why this question is such a big deal. To our society today, it might not seem that much of a concern. We're a people that is very much about the individual. Who your father is, who you are descended from, what people you are a part of, is neat to know, but not essential.

People are free to be whoever they want to be, to pursue their own identity. Just be yourself, whoever you decide that is. People are supposedly blank canvases, or lumps of clay – able to be formed and shaped into whatever they want, and to say otherwise is “violence.” Parents affirm their children in whoever they decide they are, rather than guide and shape them with the wisdom they have been given.

This rejection of the role of parents, of fathers, has awful effects: young men growing up to be gang members, violent criminals because they have no father, young women getting pregnant out of wedlock because they've not been taught what it is to look for a good man, or that they are worthy of having one as their husband, and many tragic results.

You see, part of why it matters who your father is is that a key role of a father is to teach his children who they are. A father is supposed to pass an identity on to his kids. A father is to give his children a sense of security and belonging; dad will take care of them, cherish them when the world attacks them, help guide them to their place in life.

A father is to teach his children what is truly important, especially the Christian faith. That isn't to say that mothers don't have a huge role; they most certainly do. But God's Word specifically states that it is the father who is to bring up the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord – Ephesians 6:4.

When this doesn't happen, we see the effects in our churches. One recent study found that where a father attends church only irregularly, or not at all, only two to three percent of children will grow up to attend church regularly, versus thirty to forty percent if their father attends regularly. If the father shows through his example that the faith is unimportant, the children will learn and follow their father. If the father makes the faith a priority in both word and example, his children will follow that and be blessed.

If earthly fathers have such enormous effects on who their children are, how much more so their spiritual father. If the Lord God is your heavenly Father, then you are given the greatest identity possible: a literal child of God. If He is not, then you are left to figure it out on your own, to try to make something up and hope it stands up to the trials of life.

If God is your Father, then you have incredible value, because the God who formed the universe, from the tiniest subatomic particles to the galaxies hundreds of thousands of light-years across and everything in-between, purposefully made you and deliberately placed you in to His creation. If you are spiritually fatherless, then your existence is perhaps a cosmic accident, a random event with no real explanation.

If God is your Father, then you have purpose and meaning in your existence. As the well-known passage from Jeremiah says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD.” Without God, your life is just a tiny blip in the unimaginable vastness of the universe, totally unimportant, of no significance.

With the Lord as your Father, you have perfect security, perfect provision. He watches over the sparrows; He clothes the lilies of the field. He will not fail to care for you. The Father in heaven neither slumbers nor sleeps; His eye is always on His beloved children and His mighty arm upholds them. If God isn’t there, then you’re on your own.

Who your father is also determines where your true home is. Our home countries are often affectionately called our “fatherland.” Without God as your Father, there is no comfort when considering what awaits after this life. Without Him, there is no one to take you into a heavenly home, and you can’t make one yourself. So you’re left with uncertainty and fear.

Perhaps this is why so many people try to distract themselves with the pleasures of this life, to try to drown out the lingering fear of the unknown and the fact that it can’t be escaped. You see this at wakes and celebrations of life and funerals for those who died without God as their Father. Lots of reminiscing. Lots of stories. Lots of drinking. All in an effort to ignore the question, “But where is he now?”

Without God as Father, the only eternal home is one of endless torment and suffering. Just as a home in this life that is lacking God-given love is a miserable place, even more so the darkness of hell where God withdraws all His goodness.

That is a home where everyone hates everyone else, where you can’t get away but are at the same time crushingly lonely, where there is never peace, only endless conflict and strife. That place is no home, but a prison from which there can be no escape.

For those who have God as their heavenly Father, though, an infinitely better home awaits. It’s one of the great passages of comfort in Scripture where Jesus says that He is going ahead to prepare a place for His disciples in His Father’s house. In that house, there are many rooms, enough for all He would bring in. It’s an irony that, at Christ’s birth, there were no rooms for Him, but through Him we might come into the heavenly house that cannot run out of rooms.

In the Father’s house dwell all His children, brought there by the heavenly angels. There’s no unknown, no purgatory to wander through, just those heavenly messengers bringing the souls of the faithful departed into eternal bliss.

In the Father’s house, the halls continually ring with praise and thanksgiving, joyful laughter, choirs of saints and angels singing, and even with all this, it’s a place of perfect rest, perfect peace.

And this rest comes without sleep, as those in paradise never get tired. All who are there are at perfect peace with one another.

And all this flows from the fact that in this house dwells God the Father Himself. He, with the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, fill the house with unending light and life. The living waters continually flow, the feast of the Lamb goes on without end. All this awaits those who have God as their Father.

Perhaps the greatest part of this issue of fatherhood is this: if the Lord God is your Father, then you are loved. You were formed out of love. You are cared for out of love. You are guided through life because of His love. He gives you love for others, and others love for you.

And even if it were that no one else in the world seemed to care for you in the least, the Almighty God would still love you with a love that is perfect and unending. As He tells you in His Word, nothing in this creation can separate you from His love for you in Christ Jesus.

So then, who is your Father? From everything the Bible says about the many blessings that come from having God as your Father, and the curses that come if you don't, you'd think the clear choice would be to choose God.

But here's the catch: one of the key elements of having a father is that you don't get to choose who he is. You don't pick your father; he is who he is, determined at the moment you're conceived. None of my boys got to pick me as their father. Rather, by the reality of how people come into existence, I am their father.

Every single person who exists has a father, and not one chose who he is. They might not have a good relationship with him; they might not even know who he is. But he's still their father regardless.

This is true of our fathers in the spiritual realm as well. You don't get to choose who He is. And in fact, the Scriptures tell us that our father to start with isn't who we'd expect.

We're told in Ephesians 2 that we "once walked, following the prince of the power of the air (Satan), the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience," and also that we "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Sons of disobedience. Children of wrath. Following the devil.

This is all humanity. Everyone. Because our nature itself has been corrupted by sin, we are all born in sin, sinful from the very beginning. Apart from God's saving action, our father is Satan.

This reality is part of what makes the Jews so mad at Jesus. They say that, because they are the biological descendants of Abraham, God has to be their Father in heaven. When Jesus points out that this isn't true, and demonstrates it by showing their rejection of God's own Word, they get furious with Him, calling Jesus illegitimate and a Samaritan and even demon-possessed.

This reaction isn't unique to just those Jews, either. Still today, when you tell people that they are inherently sinful and that there is no path to eternal life apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they tend to get quite upset also.

The Jews are confident in their descent from Abraham, though Jesus points out that they are neither following in the footsteps of Abraham nor keeping the words of the God who chose Abraham and gave Him the promise. People are confident that they're Christians and will be in heaven because they were confirmed and their name is on a congregation roster somewhere, despite the fact that they're breaking their confirmation vows and openly despising the Word of God. Jesus says that those who do not have God the Father as their Father are children of the devil.

So if we're by nature all children of wrath, and you can't choose your heavenly father, what hope do you have? This is where the love of God truly shines. You can't choose God as your Father, but He can and does choose you as His children.

God the Father has from eternity one only-begotten Son. But out of love, the Father sent His beloved Son to earth to claim us. We were enslaved to sin, bound by the chains of death, and so the Father gave his Son to pay our ransom price with His blood.

If you've ever considered adopting a child, you know that it's very expensive. God paid the price to adopt all of humanity, and so great was the price that only the life of God would suffice. And He gave it willingly!

Not only are you purchased by the blood of Jesus, you are washed and even reborn by His Word joined to water. That's what Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3, this new birth of water and the Spirit that allows one to enter the Kingdom of God. You are given a new life in the font, the life of God. He puts His name on you there, the family name, the name of God. You are joined to His Son and therefore become His sons and daughters as well.

His house becomes your home. His kingdom becomes your inheritance. He puts His Word in your mouth and His Spirit in your heart. He calls you by name; you become His. Not because of anything you've done, for remember, you can't choose your Father. But He can choose you, and in His Son, He has.

This new identity as a child of the Most High God then shapes who you are, and not just in the life to come, but even now in this life. Because you are His children, born of His Spirit, you can hear His Word.

And this doesn't mean have the sounds go in your ears and be understood by your brain. No, to hear God's Word is to have it go into both mind and heart, to both know it and believe it. Jesus points out in our reading that the Jews who are rejecting Him cannot do this; they are literally "unable" to do this. It is a gift from God the Father that His children can hear and keep His Word.

Through His Word, He shapes our desires to be His desires, our ways to be His ways. As His children, He guides us into what is best for us. His Commandments are given to us that we might be blessed and also that we might reflect His goodness to the world around us.

Like earthly children, we may not always understand our Father's Word and why He says what He says, but we trust in Him, because He loves us with a love that is greater than anything else in this world.

Trusting in His love, we can share His Word with those who have run away from the Father, His prodigal sons and daughters. Just as He would continue to call even to those children of Abraham who crucified His Son, He continues to call today to all His children.

Though we have not deserved it in the least, God the Father has made us His sons and daughters through the death of His Son on the cross.

He has paid the priceless debt. He has conquered the unconquerable foe. He has given everlasting life to those dead in trespasses and sins. He has literally moved heaven and earth, joining the two through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and He has done it all so that we may call Him Our Father.

In His name, amen.