

## Bible Study: John 8:31-36

### God is One and One of a Kind

#### Luther on John

From the very beginning the evangelist John teaches and documents most convincingly the sublime article of our holy Christian faith according to which we believe and confess; the one true, almighty, and eternal God. But he states expressly that three distinct Persons dwell in that same single divine essence, namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father begets the Son from eternity, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, etc. Therefore, there are three distinct Persons, equal in glory and majesty; yet there is only one divine essence.

The first man to attack the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was the heretic Cerinthus, a contemporary of the apostles. He presumed to fathom and comprehend this article with his reason. Therefore, he declared that the Word was not God; and in order to support this view he cited the verse from Deuteronomy (6:4): "The Lord our God is one God"; and also (Deut. 5:7): "You shall have no other gods before Me." With this pretence he worked great harm. He gained a powerful following. Many Jews attached themselves to him, even some of those who had believed in Christ. It must be viewed as a manifestation of divine grace that Cerinthus assailed this article during the lifetime of the apostles; for this is what prompted John, the foremost of the apostles still living at the time, to write his Gospel. In it he proves this article conclusively: that Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is true, natural, and eternal God with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

John had a very good reason for basing his proof on Moses, since it was he of whom Cerinthus and his followers had boasted. Wresting Moses from their hands, mouth, and heart, John now quotes Moses in an attack against their blasphemous heresies and refutes them completely. This was a veritable masterstroke. Therefore, the evangelist John is a master above all the other evangelists, for he treats of this doctrine of Christ's divinity and His humanity persistently and diligently. He joins these two natures together. When Christ becomes man, He speaks to us, performs miracles, and dies according to His humanity. And then His divinity is also established with plain words.

#### John 8:31-36 – True disciples

**So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.<sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.<sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.<sup>37</sup> I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.<sup>38</sup> I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."**

#### Questions for discussion

**v.31) So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him.** Leaders of the Jews rather than Jews in general. More specifically, Scribes and Pharisees in the Temple, as per John 8:1-3

**If you abide in my word.** The way Jesus addressed them implies that their belief in Him was superficial. Jesus explained that true discipleship means accepting all of His teaching and remaining faithful to it.

**Abiding.** Major theme in John, defining the relationship not only of the persons in the Trinity but also between believers and Christ.

See John 17:22

See also John 15:4-14 and notice (1) the order of things (from the source and upholder of life, from the vine to the branches) and (2) the connection/analogy Jesus makes between this objective botanical **truth** and God's Word/Commandments.

Jesus said to him [Thomas], I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (*John 14:6*)

Bernard of Clairvaux said: I wish to follow with all my strength the lowly Jesus; I wish Him, who loved me and gave Himself for me, to embrace me with the arms of His love, which suffered in my stead; but I must also feed on the Paschal Lamb, for unless I eat His Flesh and drink His Blood I have no life in me. It is one thing to follow Jesus, another to hold Him, another to feed on Him. To follow Him is a life-giving purpose; to hold and embrace Him a solemn joy; to feed on Him a blissful life.

**v.32) If you abide in my word ... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**

Only in Jesus and His teaching will anyone be free from sin, death, and Satan's rule and deceptions. Only in Jesus is anyone truly free to serve God with a pure heart, a clear conscience and without fear.

**v.33) We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone.**

Though their history says otherwise (think of the Egyptian slavery and the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles) and though presently subject to Rome and the Herodians, these proud leaders asserted their independence by appealing to the heritage of Abraham, a wandering Aramean. **אָבִד** *Oved*, the Hebrew word translated as 'wandering' from Deuteronomy 26:5 means lost, perishing, fugitive, that is, a slave runner.

**v.34) Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.**

Jesus states, objectively, that since the fall, all people are sinners and enslaved to sin, bound to self-centeredness, doomed to death and blind to their slavery.

**vs. 35-36) The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.**

Slaves live in slave quarters, which are like barns for storing tools and housing animals. Slave quarters are badly insulated and wet. They lack food and in hygiene and abound in pests and disease. Only a select few ever got to do light work in their master's house. Slaves can never be sure of their present and future status. Only the Son of God, Jesus Christ, can bring genuine freedom, make us children of God and give access to the Father's house through faith in His faithfulness.

**So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** As Christ says, [baptized people] have been made free again. Therefore, they are now not only able to hear the Word, but also to agree with it and accept it, although in great weakness (*Formula of Concord Solid Declaration II 67*)

**v.37) I know that you are offspring of Abraham.** I know your pretence. I know what you are ignoring. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me? (*John 7:19*)

**Yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.**

**Matthew 5:17-19** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Lastly, see 1 John 4:10-16