

Be of God

John 8:46-59 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." ⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'" ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Abraham was of God. He heard God's call and obeyed. Even when laughing Isaac asked his father, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for sacrifice?" Abraham obeyed. When it came time to build the altar and lay the wood upon it, Abraham obeyed. Even when he had to bind the only son from his wife Sarah and place him on top of the altar and wood, Abraham obeyed. And when it was time to take the knife and kill Isaac, Abraham obeyed. He was of God. But the Lord intervened. "Do not lay a hand on the boy, for now I know you fear God." Instead of Isaac, Abraham would sacrifice the ram caught in the thicket. So he called the name of the mountain, "The Lord will provide."

2 Abraham was of God, but those who claimed him as their father, the Jews, were not. It wasn't enough to have Abraham's blood in their veins. They needed Abraham's faith in their hearts. Of Abraham Moses and St. Paul declared, "He believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Ge 15:6). But the Jews who accuse Jesus of having a demon do not share this faith with their forefather. Jesus cuts straight to the point: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. You have not known [the Father]."

I know him. If I were to say I do not know him, I would be a liar like you.” And then, the line that causes grammar teachers to wince and theologians to prick their ears: “Before Abraham was, I AM.” That’s not a grammatical error. It’s a statement of Jesus’ unity with the Lord who from the burning bush told Moses His name: “I AM who I AM.”

3 The Jews thought they had their religion in a neat little package, but Jesus tore the package open. God took on human flesh and dwelled with His people in the person of Jesus. You cannot know the Father without knowing Jesus. You cannot be Abraham’s descendant without sharing his faith. And you cannot be of God without hearing and keeping His word. So what about you? Are you of God? Or do you suppose you can reach the Heavenly Father on your own without Jesus and apart from the means through which He has promised to deliver grace? Do you imagine that having parents who were faithful church-goers earns you their eternal inheritance? Or Vice-versa, do you hope your faith will earn salvation for your children or your parents? Do you elect only to be a hearer of God’s word when it’s convenient and only when everything else gets done? If so, repent.

4 The wood was bound and placed upon Isaac. He plodded the path up the mountain to where the sacrifice will be offered. Isaac was bound to the wood. But this Isaac is the fulfillment of the first Isaac. The Second Isaac is the Son of God, not the Son of Abraham. Before Abraham was, I AM, he said. This Jesus Christ is the sacrifice to which all other sacrifices pointed. But He is unlike any sacrifice before Him. All the lambs who shed their blood on the altar in the temple were sacrificed against their will. So would have been Isaac, and so was the ram, caught in the thicket. But the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world did what no other sacrificial lamb did: He went willingly. “No one takes [my life] from me,” He said, “but I lay it down of my own accord.” (Jn 10:18)

5 So, the writer of Hebrews said, Jesus Christ entered the most holy place once and for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by means of His own blood. He is the ultimate sacrifice. All the other sacrifices before Him simply pointed to His sacrificial death on the cross

in the place of sinners. You are not by nature “of God.” By nature, you are rebellious against God. But He who was in His very nature God took your place. He took your place, took Abraham’s place, took the place of the Jews who said he was possessed by a demon, and died. And so for His sake, you are of God.

6 Just like Lucas. God claimed Lucas today by placing His Triune Name upon Him and speaking the word of faith and forgiveness of sins into Lucas’ ear. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, you became of God. You heard the Word of God, and The Word of God in human flesh kept that word perfectly in your place. So now you stand in His place. You, and Lucas, and all who have received the Lord’s gift of faith through the waters of Holy Baptism have become beloved children of God. And so now the Lord’s call to be of God is a call to you simply to remain. Remain a hearer of the Word. Abraham believed God—not of His own—but because of the Lord’s gift of faith. So you believe God and it is credited to you as righteousness because the Lord has given you this precious treasure of faith.

7 If anyone keeps my word, Jesus promised, he will never see death. So you do. You keep God’s word because it has been given to you. You keep His word and are kept by His word. His Word continues to come to you, to hold you fast in the relationship He has established with you, to speak you forgiven, and to whisper faith into your ear. So you will never see death. Even should death claim your body, even though you may taste death, you will never see it. You will pass from death into life as certainly as the Lord with whom you were joined in Holy Baptism defeated death and passed from death to life.

8 Abraham called the place where the Lord provided the sacrifice that set Isaac free, “The Lord provides.” At that altar, God took away Isaac’s condemnation and declared Abraham righteous. So here at this altar, the Lord provides. He provides to you the body and blood of the very Lamb of God who was slain for your sins and yet lives. At this mountain, as at Calvary, the Lord provides. He takes away your sins and bids you taste something far better than death.

Here, you taste life. Here, you who are of God by His gift of faith, have this as a promise that you will not see death: the very Body and Blood of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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