

John 8:41

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

Analysis

Ye do the deeds of your father—Jesus repeats His accusation from verse 38, now driving toward explicit identification. The present tense ποιεῖτε (poieite, 'you are doing') indicates habitual action, not isolated incidents. Their consistent behavior—rejecting truth, plotting murder—reveals paternity. Children imitate fathers; their deeds expose whose children they truly are.

Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication—This response may function on multiple levels. Literally, they assert legitimate birth and covenant membership—not illegitimate children excluded from the assembly (Deuteronomy 23:2). But there may be darker subtext: were they subtly attacking Jesus's virgin birth, implying HE was illegitimate? Matthew and Luke's Gospels record Joseph's initial plan to divorce Mary quietly when she was found pregnant (Matthew 1:18-19), suggesting rumors about Jesus's paternity may have circulated. If so, this is vicious ad hominem attack: 'We're not bastards—unlike you.'

Theologically, the claim 'not born of fornication' asserts covenant faithfulness. The prophets repeatedly used adultery/fornication as metaphor for Israel's idolatry (Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 3:6-10, Ezekiel 16, 23). Claiming 'we're not born of fornication' means 'we haven't committed spiritual adultery by worshiping false gods—we're faithful to Yahweh, the one true God.'

We have one Father, even God—The climactic claim: God is their Father (πατέρα ἔνα ἔχομεν τὸν Θεόν/patera hena echomen ton Theon). The emphatic 'one' (ἔνα/

hena) may echo Shema: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD' (Deuteronomy 6:4). They're asserting monotheistic orthodoxy against perceived accusations of spiritual illegitimacy. Jesus has questioned their Abrahamic paternity; they escalate by claiming God Himself as Father. This sets up Jesus's devastating response in verse 42: if God were your Father, you would love me.

Historical Context

The phrase 'born of fornication' had specific covenantal connotations in Second Temple Judaism. Deuteronomy 23:2 excluded 'bastards' (רָמָמָן/mamzer, children of forbidden unions) from the assembly for ten generations. This wasn't merely social stigma but ritual exclusion from covenant community. By asserting 'we're not born of fornication,' they claim full covenant membership, legitimate standing before God.

The prophetic tradition used marriage/adultery as extended metaphor for God's covenant relationship with Israel. Hosea married prostitute Gomer to dramatize Israel's spiritual adultery (Hosea 1:2). Jeremiah accused Judah: 'Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers' (Jeremiah 3:1). Ezekiel 16 describes Jerusalem as unfaithful wife who 'played the harlot' with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. In this symbolic framework, idolatry = adultery/fornication; monotheistic faithfulness = covenant marriage fidelity.

By claiming 'we have one Father, even God,' Jesus's opponents assert they've remained faithful to Yahweh, unlike their idolatrous ancestors who worshiped Baal, Asherah, Molech, and foreign gods. They've kept the first commandment: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3). They worship at the true temple, observe Torah, maintain ritual purity—surely this proves God is their Father?

Yet Jesus will demolish this claim (v.42-44) by showing that true children of God love the Son whom the Father sent. Their rejection of Christ proves they don't truly know or love the Father, despite orthodox monotheism. This anticipates 1 John 2:23: 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.' Claiming God as Father while rejecting His Son is impossible—such claims are self-refuting

lies.

Some scholars speculate the 'born of fornication' comment was veiled attack on Jesus's virgin birth. Talmudic texts (though written later) contain hostile traditions about Jesus's parentage. Celsus (2nd century pagan critic) claimed Mary committed adultery with Roman soldier Pantera. While we can't be certain Jesus's opponents knew His birth circumstances, the awkward insertion of this claim suggests possible double meaning: asserting their own legitimacy while questioning His.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How can people claim God as Father while rejecting the Son whom the Father sent?
2. What is the relationship between orthodox theology (claiming monotheism) and true knowledge of God through Christ?
3. How does the prophetic metaphor of spiritual adultery/fornication illuminate our faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God?

Interlinear Text

ὑμεῖς	ποιεῖτε	τὰ	ἔργα	τοῦ	πατέρα	ὑμῶν	εἶπον	οὖν
Ye	do	G3588	the deeds	G3588	Father	of your	said they	Then
G5210	G4160		G2041		G3962	G5216	G2036	G3767
αὐτῷ	Ἡμεῖς	ἐκ	πορνείας	οὐ	γεγεννήμεθα·	ἐνα	πατέρα	
to him	We	of	fornication	not	be	one	Father	
G846	G2249	G1537	G4202	G3756	G1080	G1520	G3962	
ἔχομεν	τὸν	θεόν						
we have	G3588	even God						
G2192		G2316						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 64:8 (Parallel theme): But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Isaiah 63:16 (Parallel theme): Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.

John 8:44 (Parallel theme): Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

John 8:38 (Parallel theme): I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

Malachi 2:11 (References God): Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.