

The Truth That Sets You Free

John 8:31-36

There are two groups of people in view in this passage. First mentioned are the Pharisees who generally were hostile to the Lord and to his message. But there were also those Jews who *believed* in him. Given their reaction to his teaching on this occasion one wonders exactly what was meant by their *belief*. Perhaps they had accepted him as the Messiah but they were not ready to accept the whole counsel of his message.

The teaching of the Lord in these verses answers a number of questions that they needed to have answered, and are instructive for us today as well. First, what essential relationship is there between a true believer and God's word? The integrity of discipleship is seen when we *abide* or *live* in the word of Christ. His word is truth and our obedience to it brings true freedom.

Today our concept of liberty is often something less than the biblical teaching about freedom. The modern notion of freedom is defined by our contemporaries as the ability to do whatever we choose to do without restraint, or with very little restraint.

But *liberty* in the word of God is a matter of being set free from our enemies and the joy that comes from living in that freedom. When we come to Christ for salvation, we are set free from a complex of enemies who have us in their bondage. We are enslaved to the ways of this world, to its philosophical positions, and to the practical outworking of those positions. We are enslaved to our own sinful inclination to oppose the will of God. And, we are enslaved to the kingdom of darkness, and to the one who opposed the good of God and man, the devil. But in Christ there is emancipation that touches each aspect of our enslavement.

Our present reward, after coming to Christ, is the joy of now having a renewed will, and the prospect of living in the light of a freedom that we had never known before. Now we, by obedience to the will of God, come to experience a new kind of life that issues forth from the liberty that we now possess. Freedom from guilt comes when we, by faith, reject the life that we once lived and come to embrace new behavior that is worthy of the gospel.

These people needed to be taught the truth. They protested that, as the offspring of Abraham, they had never been enslaved to anyone. Ignorance of one's history can be a problem. Their ancestors had been enslaved to the Egyptians for a long time, (and to other nations as well), and they themselves were under the thumb of Rome. They, like so many people today, cannot see that they are enslaved, and think that they do not need liberation.

But the Lord explained that he was speaking of the slavery of sin. Those who sin are slaves to it. It does not matter what the sin is. It may be the misuse of the body, or it may be relational sin, or it may be failure to worship the true and living God in the way that he has ordained.

With redemption comes the possibility of a new liberty from the power of sin. We now have the will to say *no* to unrighteousness and *yes* to the right. And when we do obey the commandment of the Lord, we learn to live in the joy of a freedom that the people of this world know nothing about. Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, but were found at midnight singing the praises of God. They were physically bound in the prison stocks, but were far freer than the jailer who did not yet know Christ as savior.

To come to Christ is to no longer be a slave but to become a son or daughter of the Lord. We are adopted into his family. And our liberty comes to us because Christ is the uniquely obedient Son the Father. He has loved the Father with all his heart and soul and mind. We have not. He has loved his neighbor as himself even to the point of death on the cross. We have failed to love our neighbor in that way. But, when we put our faith in him, we receive his obedience as a free gift, and it becomes the foundation of our standing with God. We are justified because Christ has come to our rescue. And when, in the course of our lives, we obey him, we discover the fruit of a liberation that this world knows nothing about.

