

## **John 8:31-36 – Truth and Freedom**

✓ As Pilate said, “What is truth?”

**So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever, the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (8:31-36)**

Throughout history people have always sought to know the truth about reality, about what is right and wrong, and about what is meaningful and purposeful in life. As a result, endless philosophies, worldviews, and religious systems have arisen over the centuries, each purporting to teach absolute truth, and each in turn canceling out the “absolute” truths of those that came before it.

The belief that mankind, on his own, could formulate the perfect philosophical system -- one that would fully explain all of reality -- reached its peak during the Enlightenment. Human reason, it was thought, would eventually discover the answers to all of life’s questions, and thereby solve all of society’s problems. The assumption was that, through intellectual achievements and the growing body of scientific knowledge, humanity would eventually bring about a Utopia. Hence, there was no need for religion, which had kept people in stifling darkness for centuries. There was no interest in divine revelation or salvation, since man believed he could save himself from his problems.

But the optimism of the Enlightenment has faded to black in recent times. The unimaginable slaughter of two world wars, the unfathomable evil of the Holocaust, and the terrifying reality of nuclear war [and terrorism] quickly shattered the unrealistic idealism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In its place, skepticism and pessimism began to take hold, as feelings of uncertainty (about life and even reality) became more and more widespread. Increasingly the very concept of truth itself came under fire, especially the possibility of knowing absolute truth. Sinners want to do evil and feel no guilt, so the lack of absolutes accommodates the desperately wicked human heart (Jer. 17:9). As Francis Schaeffer put it, all of Western culture -- including philosophy art, music, literature, education, and modern theology -- in rejecting Scripture plunged beneath the line of despair (see especially his books *The God Who Is There* and *Escape from Reason*). People imagined that by denying the existence of absolute truth and by throwing off the shackles of biblical morality they would finally be set free. Instead, they found themselves only more empty and enslaved to destructive passions.

The skepticism of the twentieth century culminated with the rise of postmodernism, a worldview that is still in vogue today. In contrast to the modernists, whose rationalistic optimism flowed out of the Enlightenment, postmodernists reject the notion that ultimate truth is knowable or even exists. Rather, they contend that the “truths” people believe are merely societal norms created by the culture in which they live. Thus there are no timeless truths, but only ephemeral preferences. Whatever works for people is true for them; pragmatism and relativism reign “supreme. (Ironically the only thing postmodernists are absolutely certain of is that nothing is absolutely certain. As a result, they are forced to defend an illogical position -- namely that it is a universal, comprehensive truth that there are no universal, comprehensive truths.)

Because postmodernists want to sin freely (primarily it seems, in the sexual area), they need to view all truth as culturally determined, and argue that no morality or law is supreme. The noblest virtue therefore is tolerance of other views. Such is especially true in the area of morals, where imposing one’s values on someone else is seen as an egregious offense. That makes biblical Christianity the most intolerable belief. By rejecting the possibility of absolute truth, postmodernism commits eternal suicide by simultaneously rejecting the only path to true freedom -- the absolutely, universally and exclusively true message of the gospel. Even the contemporary church no longer believes in the gospel as the only way to heaven; 85 percent of American “Christians” believe there are other ways to heaven. Ninety-one percent of Roman Catholics agree (Newsweek, August 2005). Obviously this postmodern tolerance redefines the gospel and missions in a disastrous way and denigrates doctrine and dogmatism as unloving, thus destroying the foundational truths necessary for salvation.

In contrast to the transient speculations of men, the Bible teaches timeless truth -- truth that is absolute for all people in all cultures in all ages -- about God and man, good and evil, life and death, and especially the way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Biblical Christianity thus rejects both the antinatural bias of modernism, and the skepticism and relativism of postmodernism.

While the world clings to its own uncertain wisdom, which Scripture describes as “earthly, natural, demonic” (James 3:15), believers have been given in Scripture the rock solid truth of God Himself. It declares that God is the “God of truth” (Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16); Jesus is “full of truth” (John 1:14; cf. v.17; Eph. 4:21) and “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14-6); and the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16-13-1 John 5:6). The Bible is the “word of truth” (Tim. 2:15); as Jesus prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17; cf. 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 119:43,142,151,160). Like God Himself, His truth is eternal (Ps. 117:2) and unchanging (Ps. 119:89).

Salvation comes from “faith in the truth” (2 Thes. 2:13; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25), thus the redeemed are “those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3). In contrast, unbelievers are those who are “deprived of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5); “have gone astray from the truth” (2 Tim. 2:18); are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7); “oppose the truth” (v.8); and “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:4; cf. Titus 1:14).

Believers on the other hand, are to worship God in truth (John 4-23-24), be committed to the truth (Pr. 23:23), obey the truth (1 Peter 1-22-cf Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7), love the truth (cf. 2 Thes. 2:10), speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and walk in the truth (Ps. 26:3; 86:11; 2 John 4; 3 John 3-A). In fact, truth is central to the existence and mission of the church, which is to be “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Paul’s repeated command to Timothy, “Timothy guard what has been entrusted to you... Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14), reflects the church’s responsibility to protect the precious truths of Scripture.

The truth that brings spiritual freedom is the theme of this brief but powerful passage. The dialogue it records took place in the waning months of the Lord’s earthly ministry. Jesus had repeatedly presented His claim to be the Son of God and Messiah, and had performed countless miracles to verify that claim (cf. 10:25,37-38; 14:11; 15:24). Yet the people and the leaders had rejected Him. Their growing hostility had resulted in increasing opposition, culminating in a plot to murder Him (cf. 5:18; 7:1,19,25) -- a plot that would come to fruition at the cross, now less than six months away.

But not everyone was hostile to Jesus. Verse 30 notes that “as He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him” (cf. 4:39,41,50,53; 7:31). Their belief, as will soon become evident, was not saving faith, but was merely the first step toward it. Thus the Lord’s goal in this section was to point them to full saving faith in Him -- the type of faith that would truly set them free from sin, death, Satan, and hell. To that end, He began by explaining the pathway to freedom -- the necessary steps that lead to the freedom of genuine salvation. Then He exposed the pretense of freedom -- the false notions that deceived these Jews into thinking that they were already genuinely saved. Finally He extended the promise of freedom -- the absolute guarantee of true freedom for all who come to genuine saving faith. [MacArthur, John Jr., 2006, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, John 1-11*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL]

✓ And what is freedom? How do you define freedom? Does Patrick Henry’s quote fit that definition?

“Is life so dear and peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I care not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”

✓ Does Paul’s statement from Gal 5:1 fit that definition?

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

✓ Freedom from... Freedom for... What? Saved from... Saved for... What?

“Being able to be all that you were meant to be; all that is possible for you to do and be.”

✓ Don’t you long for that? Jesus has the key: Truth makes you free!

✓ v.31

Ø They “believed” His words but did not have saving faith yet. As we have discussed, “believing” is a BIG word – all encompassing.

Ø Theologians say saving faith involves: notitia, assensus, and fiducia.

- § Knowledge, assent (affirmation), trust (faith)
- § Mind, emotions, will
- ∅ First step is notitia – examine the evidence
- ∅ “abide in my word” – read, listen, think, ponder, meditate, chew, test. Is it true?
- ∅ It’s not a requirement for becoming, but a characteristic of a disciple.
- ∅ All Christians are disciples. Not all disciples are Christians.
- ∅ Be Word oriented.
- √ v.32
  - ∅ “You shall know the truth” – fact. An inevitable result or blessing.
    - § Revelation of Scripture as taught by God the Holy Spirit.
    - § Intimate knowledge. Difficult to be fooled.
    - § Prov. 2:1-5
    - {1} My son, if you will receive my words  
And treasure my commandments within you,**
    - {2} Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
Incline your heart to understanding;**
    - {3} For if you cry for discernment,  
Lift your voice for understanding;**
    - {4} If you seek her as silver  
And search for her as for hidden treasures;**
    - {5} Then you will discern the fear of the LORD  
And discover the knowledge of God.**
  - ∅ “shall make you free.”
    - § Free from all our hang-ups – fear, guilt, pride, anger, etc.
    - § Free from bondage of falsehood, condemnation, judgment, spiritual death, sin.
      - {18} "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,  
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.  
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,  
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,  
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED**
    - § Gal 5:1.
- √ v.33
  - ∅ They claimed religious freedom – obviously not national freedom. “Nobody tells us how to worship.”
  - ∅ Self sufficient; thought they were ok.
- √ v.34,35
  - ∅ Truly, Truly... (important) – I always say “Listen to me...”
  - ∅ Everyone who sins is a slave to sin, and everyone sins...
  - ∅ Sons stay in the house; slaves will have to leave.
  - ∅ If you are my disciple, you are free, no longer a slave, and you will stay: just like Isaac and Ishmael.
  - ∅ Set free from the law of bondage and death.
  - ∅ Release and adopted.